



ALISTER E. McGRATH

HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought

SECOND EDITION

 WILEY-BLACKWELL

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HISTORICAL THEOLOGY

An Introduction to the History of Christian Thought

SECOND EDITION

ALISTER E. MCGRATH

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How to Use this Book

This book aims to introduce you to historical theology as an important and interesting subject. It is also a very large topic; to do justice to it, at least five substantial volumes would be required. This book is an introduction to its aims and themes, which aims to pack as much useful information into a single volume as is realistically possible, using approaches which have been tried and tested in classrooms in Europe, North America, and Australasia. The book makes use of some material already presented in the best-selling work *Christian Theology: An Introduction*, which has been reconfigured for the specific purpose of introducing students to the discipline of historical theology. Although much new material has been added and some existing material rewritten, the basic approach and some contents of this earlier work have been retained.

The guiding principle which lies behind this volume is *selective attention*. It is like a map, giving you a good idea of the landscape, filling in enough detail to help you make sense of things, and making it easier to move on to a more detailed engagement with any of its features. It is assumed that you do not have the time to become familiar with every aspect of the history of Christian thought, but want a general familiarity with its most important aspects. The approach adopted is to begin by painting a scene using some very broad-brush strokes, and then filling in the fine detail in selected areas of importance. This will allow you to come away from reading this book with a good general understanding of the development of Christian theology. Despite its brevity, however, the work includes a lot of material – considerably more than is included in most introductions of this kind.

The book opens with an Introduction which tries to explain what historical theology is, how it fits into the study of theology as a whole, and why it is a subject worth studying. You are strongly recommended to read this Introduction before proceeding further, as it will help you get a sense of orientation as you approach the subject.

To break the material down into manageable sections, the history of Christian thought has been divided into four broad periods. While this division of history is useful, it is important to realize that it is slightly

arbitrary at points. We need to heed the warning of the Cambridge historian G. M. Trevelyan (1876–1962) on this matter: “Unlike dates, periods are not facts. They are retrospective conceptions that we form about past events, useful to focus discussion, but very often leading historical thought astray.” These four divisions are:

Chapter 1 The Patristic Period, c.100–451

Chapter 2 The Middle Ages and the Renaissance, c.500–1500

Chapter 3 The Reformation and Post-Reformation Periods, 1500–1750

Chapter 4 The Modern Period, 1750 to the Present Day

These divisions, though a little arbitrary, have proved useful in a teaching context, and have therefore been retained. Each chapter contains two major sections, as follows:

1. A general *overview* of the period in question, which identifies the historical background to the period, and its main theological developments, individual theologians, and schools of thought or theological movements which you need to know about. It also introduces the basic theological vocabulary which you will need to know to make sense of other theological works. You should read this overview before exploring the individual case studies that follow. If you need a very brief overview of the history of Christian thought, you are recommended to read only the four historical overviews, and leave the individual case studies for study at a later date.

2. A series of individual *case studies* that examine some of the themes of the period in question in much greater detail. This allows you to supplement a general understanding of the period with a specific knowledge of some of its significant themes. In some cases, the case studies are text-intensive, allowing you to engage with primary texts of importance. Here, you will be given some guidance as to how to read the texts and gain the most from them. Other case studies may take the form of general surveys, aiming to pack as much information as possible into a limited space.

If you are using the book to teach yourself historical theology, it is recommended that you read the chapters in the order in which they are presented. If you want to do nothing more than gain an overview of each period, you need only read the historical overviews; the detailed

engagement with specific themes in the case studies can be left for another time.

This volume works on the basis of “explain it the first time round.” Thus the material on the medieval period assumes that you know about the patristic period, the material on the sixteenth century assumes that you know about the medieval period, and so forth. However, if you are using the book in conjunction with a taught course, you can easily work out which sections of the book relate to the ordering of material used by your teacher. If in doubt, ask for guidance. A closing section entitled “For Further Reading” will allow you to identify books or articles which will be helpful to you if you want to follow up on anything that interested you, and which you would like to explore in greater depth.

If you come across terms you don’t understand, you have two options. First, try the glossary at the end of the work, which may give you a brief definition of the term and refer you to a discussion of the relevant material in the text. Second, try the index, which will provide you with a more extensive analysis of key discussion locations within the volume.

Finally, be assured that everything in this book – including the contents and the arrangement of the material – has been checked out at first hand with student audiences and readers in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The work is probably about as user-friendly as you can get. But both the author and publisher welcome suggestions from teachers and students for further improvement, which will be included in later editions of the work.

Introduction

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This volume is a basic introduction to the discipline of historical theology. Before looking at its themes in more detail, it is important to have a sense of the place and importance of this discipline within theology as a whole. To begin with, we shall consider the historical development of Christian theology as an academic subject, and try to understand how the specific discipline of “historical theology” fits into this overall picture.

The Concept of “Theology”: A Brief Introduction

The word “theology” is easily broken down into two Greek words: *theos* (God) and *logos* (word or discourse). Theology is thus “discourse about God,” in much the same way as “biology” is discourse about life (Greek: *bios*). If there is only one God, and if that God happens to be the “God of the Christians” (to borrow a phrase from the third-century writer Tertullian), then the nature and scope of theology is relatively well defined: theology is reflection upon the God whom Christians worship and adore.

The word “theology” is not itself biblical, but came to be used occasionally in the early patristic period to refer to at least some aspects of Christian beliefs. Thus Clement of Alexandria, writing in the late second century, contrasted Christian *theologia* with the *mythologia* of pagan writers, clearly understanding “theology” to refer to “Christian truth claims about God,” which could be compared with the spurious stories of pagan mythology. Other writers of the patristic period, such as Eusebius of Caesarea, also use the term to refer to something like “the Christian understanding of God.” However, it seems that the word was not used to refer to the entire body of Christian thought, but only to those aspects relating directly to God.

Yet Christianity came into existence in a polytheistic world, where belief in the existence of many gods was a commonplace. Part of the task of the earliest Christian writers appears to have been to distinguish the Christian god from other gods in the religious marketplace. At some point, it had to be asked which god Christians were talking about, and how this god related to the “God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,” who figures so prominently in the Old Testament. The doctrine of the Trinity appears to have been, in part, a response to the pressure to identify the god that Christian theologians were speaking about.

As time passed, polytheism began to be regarded as outdated and rather primitive, especially within the sophisticated intellectual culture of the cosmopolitan city of Alexandria. The assumption that there was only one god, and that this god was identical to the Christian god, became so

widespread that, by the early Middle Ages in Europe, it seemed self-evident. Thus Thomas Aquinas, in developing arguments for the existence of God in the thirteenth century, did not think it worth demonstrating that the god whose existence he had proved was the “god of the Christians”: after all, what other god was there? To prove the existence of God was, by definition, to prove the existence of the Christian god.

Theology was thus understood as systematic analysis of the nature, purposes, and activity of God. Although “theology” was initially understood in a restricted sense to mean “the doctrine of God,” the term developed a wider meaning in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, as the University of Paris began to develop. A name had to be found for the systematic study of the Christian faith at university level. Under the influence of Parisian writers such as Peter Abelard and Gilbert of Poitiers, the Latin word *theologia* came to mean “the discipline of sacred learning,” embracing the totality of Christian doctrine, not merely one of its aspects – namely, the doctrine of God.

There is no doubt that the introduction of theology into university circles in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries gave a new stimulus to the systematization of the subject. Medieval universities – such as Paris, Bologna, and Oxford – generally had four faculties: arts, medicine, law, and theology. The faculty of arts was seen as entry level, qualifying students to go on to more advanced studies in the three “higher faculties.” This general pattern continued into the sixteenth century, as can be seen from the educational backgrounds of two leading theologians of this period. Martin Luther initially studied arts at the University of Erfurt, before going on to study within the higher faculty of theology at the same university. John Calvin began his university life by studying arts at the University of Paris, before going on to study civil law at the University of Orléans. The result of this development was that theology became established as a significant component of advanced study at European universities. As more and more universities were established in western Europe, so the academic study of theology became more widespread.

Initially, the study of Christianity in western Europe was focused on schools attached to cathedrals and monasteries. Theology was generally understood to be concerned with practical matters, such as issues of prayer and spirituality, rather than as a theoretical subject. However, with the founding of the universities, the academic study of the Christian faith

gradually moved out of monasteries and cathedrals into the public arena. The word “theology” came to be used extensively at the University of Paris during the thirteenth century to refer to the systematic discussion of Christian beliefs in general, and not simply beliefs about God. The use of the word in this sense can be seen to a limited extent in earlier works, such as the writings of Peter Abelard. However, the work which is widely regarded as being of decisive importance in establishing the general use of the term appeared in the thirteenth century – Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae*. Increasingly, theology came to be seen as a theoretical rather than a practical subject, despite reservations about this development.

Many early thirteenth-century theologians, such as Bonaventure and Alexander of Hales, were concerned about the implications of neglecting the practical side of theology. However, Thomas Aquinas’s argument that theology was a speculative and theoretical discipline gained increasing favor among theologians. This alarmed many medieval spiritual writers, such as the fourteenth-century monk Thomas à Kempis, who felt that this encouraged speculation about God rather than obedience to God. At the time of the Reformation, writers such as Martin Luther attempted to rediscover the practical aspects of theology. The Genevan Academy, founded by Calvin in 1559, was initially concerned with the theological education of pastors, oriented toward the practical needs of ministry in the church. This tradition of treating theology as concerned with the practical concerns of Christian ministry would continue in many Protestant seminaries and colleges. However, later Protestant writers operating in a university context generally returned to the medieval understanding of theology as a theoretical subject, even if they made it clear that it had certain definite practical implications in the areas of spirituality and ethics.

The rise of the Enlightenment during the eighteenth century, particularly in Germany, called the place of theology in the university into question. Enlightenment writers argued that academic inquiry should be free from any kind of external authority. Theology was regarded with suspicion, in that it was seen to be based on “articles of faith,” such as those contained in the Christian creeds or in the Bible. Theology came increasingly to be seen as outmoded. Kant argued that university faculties of philosophy were concerned with the pursuit of truth, while other faculties (such as theology, medicine, or law) were concerned with more practical matters, such as ethics and good health. Increasingly, philosophy came to be seen as the

discipline which was concerned with issues of truth; the continuing existence of a university faculty of theology would have to be justified on other grounds.

One of the most robust justifications of the need for university faculties of theology was provided in the early nineteenth century by the Protestant theologian F. D. E. Schleiermacher, who argued that it was essential for the good of both the church and the state to have a well-educated clergy. In his *Brief Outline of the Study of Theology* (1811), Schleiermacher argued that theology had three major components: philosophical theology (which identifies the “essence of Christianity”); historical theology (which deals with the history of the church, in order to understand its present situation and needs); and practical theology (which is concerned with “techniques” of church leadership and practice). This approach to theology had the result of linking its academic credentials with public agreement that it was important for society to have a well-educated clergy. This assumption was fine in early nineteenth-century Berlin, where Schleiermacher was based. But with the rise of secularism and pluralism in the West, its validity has come increasingly to be questioned.

In countries in which a strongly secular approach came to be adopted, Christian theology was virtually excluded from the university curriculum. The French Revolution of 1789 led to a series of measures designed to eliminate Christian theology from public education at every level. Most of the older universities in Australia (such as the Universities of Sydney and Melbourne) were founded on the basis of strongly secular assumptions, with theology being excluded as a matter of principle.

However, it is a pluralist rather than a secular approach which is now more widespread in the West, particularly in North America. Here, the distinctive position of Christian theology in public education has been called into question, in that it is held to privilege one religion over others. One result of this trend has been the formation of “faculties of religion” in state universities, in which a variety of religious positions are tolerated. Christian theology can therefore be taught in such a context, but only as one aspect of religious studies as a whole. For this reason, the most important centers of Christian theological education and research now tend to be in seminaries, in which a more committed approach to the issues can be adopted.

In the last few decades, a new debate has opened up in North America and beyond over the proper function of theology. The original stimulus to this debate was a volume published by Edward Farley in 1983, entitled *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education*. Farley argued that theology has changed its meaning from its classic sense of “a heartfelt knowledge of divine things” to the mastery of different and unconnected techniques. Theology has become fragmented into a collection of unrelated theoretical and practical disciplines and has lost any sense of coherence. No longer is theology a unitary discipline; it has become an aggregate of unrelated specialties. The debate now ranges more widely than this, and has raised questions about the “architecture of theology” – for example, the relationship between biblical studies and systematic theology, or systematic and pastoral theology.

With this point in mind, we may now turn to explore the architecture of theology, as we consider its various components, before considering the discipline of historical theology as a subject in its own right.

The Architecture of Theology

The great medieval scholar Etienne Gilson (1884–1978) liked to compare the great systems of scholastic theology to “cathedrals of the mind.” It is a powerful and striking image, which suggests permanence, solidity, organization, and structure – qualities that were highly prized by the writers of the period. Perhaps the image of a great medieval cathedral, evoking gasps of admiration from parties of camera-laden tourists, seems out of place today; the most that many university teachers of theology can expect these days, it seems, is a patient tolerance. But the idea of theology possessing a structure remains important. For theology is a complex discipline, bringing together a number of related fields in an uneasy alliance. Our attention in this volume will focus on historical theology, which we shall explore in the following section. However, it will be helpful to introduce some of the other components of the discipline of theology at this stage in the work.

Biblical studies

The ultimate source of Christian theology is the Bible, which bears witness to the historical grounding of Christianity in both the history of Israel and the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. (Note that the word pairs “Scripture” and “the Bible,” and “scriptural” and “biblical,” are synonymous for the purposes of theology.) As is often pointed out, Christianity is about belief in a person (Jesus Christ), rather than belief in a text (the Bible). Nevertheless, the two are closely interlocked. Historically, we know virtually nothing about Jesus Christ except what we learn from the New Testament. In trying to wrestle with the identity and significance of Jesus Christ, Christian theology is thus obliged to wrestle with the text which transmits knowledge of him. This has the result that Christian theology is intimately linked with the science of biblical criticism and interpretation – in other words, with the attempt to appreciate the distinctive literary and historical nature of the biblical texts, and to make sense of them.

The importance of biblical studies to theology is easily demonstrated. The rise of humanist biblical scholarship in the early 1500s demonstrated a series of translation errors in existing Latin versions of the Bible. As a result, pressure grew for the revision of some existing Christian doctrines, which were grounded in biblical passages that were once held to support them, but which now turned out to say something rather different. The sixteenth-century Reformation may plausibly be argued to represent an attempt to bring theology back into line with Scripture, after a period in which it had departed considerably from it.

The discipline of systematic theology (to which we shall turn in a moment) is thus dependent upon biblical scholarship, although the extent of that dependence is controverted. The reader must therefore expect to find reference to modern scholarly debates over the historical and theological role of the Bible in the present volume. To give an example, it is impossible to understand the development of modern Christologies without coming to terms with at least some of the developments in biblical scholarship over the last two centuries. Rudolf Bultmann’s **kerygmatic** approach to theology can be argued to bring together contemporary New Testament scholarship, systematic theology, and philosophical theology (specifically,

existentialism). This illustrates a vitally important point: systematic theology does not operate in a watertight compartment, isolated from other intellectual developments. It responds to developments in other disciplines (especially New Testament scholarship and philosophy).

Kerygma refers to the essential message or proclamation of the New Testament concerning the significance of Jesus Christ.

Systematic theology

The term “systematic theology” has come to be understood as “the systematic organization of theology.” But what does “systematic” mean? Two main understandings of the term have emerged. First, the term is understood to mean “organized on the basis of educational or presentational concerns.” In other words, the prime concern is to present a clear and ordered overview of the main themes of the Christian faith, often following the pattern of the Apostles’ Creed. In the second place, it can mean “organized on the basis of presuppositions about method.” In other words, philosophical ideas about how knowledge is gained determine the way in which material is arranged. This approach is of particular importance in the modern period, when a concern about theological method has become more pronounced.

In the classic period of theology, the subject matter of theology was generally organized along lines suggested by the Apostles’ Creed or Nicene Creed, beginning with the doctrine of God, and ending with **eschatology**. Classic models for the systematization of theology are provided by a number of writings. The first major theological textbook of western theology is Peter Lombard’s *Four Books of the Sentences*, compiled at the University of Paris during the twelfth century, probably during the years 1155–8. In essence, the work is a collection of quotations (or “sentences”), drawn from patristic writers in general, and Augustine in particular. These quotations were arranged topically. The first of the four books deals with the Trinity, the second with creation and sin, the third with incarnation and Christian life, and the fourth and final book with the sacraments and the last things. Commenting on these sentences became a standard practice for medieval theologians, such as Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, and Duns Scotus, although Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae*, dating from a century later, surveyed the totality of Christian theology in three parts, using principles similar to those adopted by Peter Lombard, while placing greater emphasis on philosophical questions (particularly those raised by Aristotle) and the need to reconcile the different opinions of **patristic** writers.

The section of Christian theology dealing with “end things,” especially resurrection, hell, and eternal life.

Two different models were provided at the time of the Protestant Reformation. On the Lutheran side, Philip Melanchthon produced the *Loci communes* (“Commonplaces”) in 1521. This work provided a survey of the main aspects of Christian theology, arranged topically. John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* is widely regarded as the most influential work of Protestant theology. The first edition of this work appeared in 1536, and its definitive edition in 1559. The work is arranged in four books, the first of which deals with the doctrine of God, the second with Christ as mediator between God and humanity, the third with the appropriation of redemption, and the final book with the life of the church. Other, more recent, major works of Protestant systematic theology to follow similar lines include Karl Barth’s massive *Church Dogmatics*.

Adjective used to refer to the first centuries in the history of the church, following the writing of the New Testament (c.100–451).

In the modern period, issues of method have become of greater importance, with the result that the issue of “prolegomena” has become significant. An example of a modern work of systematic theology that is heavily influenced by such concerns is F. D. E. Schleiermacher’s *Christian Faith*, the first edition of which appeared in 1821–2. The organization of material within this work is governed by the presupposition that theology concerns the analysis of human experience. Thus Schleiermacher famously places the doctrine of the Trinity at the *end* of his exposition of systematic theology, whereas Aquinas placed it toward the beginning.

Modern Catholic theology has developed in a number of directions. The great Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner surveyed the main themes of Christian theology primarily through a series of essays – now gathered together as the 23 volumes of his *Theological Investigations*. Hans Urs von Balthasar also developed a thematic approach. His seven-volume *The Glory of the Lord* engaged the question of “theological aesthetics,” focusing on the contemplation of the true, the good, and the beautiful.

Philosophical theology

Theology is an intellectual discipline in its own right, concerned with many of the questions that have intrigued humanity from the dawn of history. Is there a god? What is this god like? Why are we here? Questions such as this are asked outside the Christian community as well as within it. So how do these conversations relate to one another? How do Christian discussions of the nature of God relate to those within the western philosophical tradition? Is there a common ground? Philosophical theology is concerned with what might be called “finding the common ground” between Christian faith and other areas of intellectual activity. Thomas Aquinas’s Five Ways (that is, five arguments for the existence of God) are often cited as an example of philosophical theology, in which non-religious arguments or considerations are seen to lead to religious conclusions.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that there exists a trend within Christian theology which has been severely critical of attempts to use secular philosophies in matters of theology. Tertullian raised the question in the second century: “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? or the Academy with the church?” Concerns were also raised about the philosophical underpinning of the eucharistic theology of Berengar of Tours in the eleventh century, which seemed to some to reduce the question of the “real presence” to some kind of logical puzzle.

More recently, similar concerns have been raised in the writings of Karl Barth, who argued that the use of philosophy in this way ultimately made God’s self-revelation dependent upon a particular philosophy, and thus compromised the freedom of God. Others, such as the Thomist writer Jacques Maritain, took a much more positive attitude to the theological role of philosophy. The reader can therefore expect to encounter, both in the past and in the present, a continuing debate concerning the scope and limits of philosophy within theology.

Pastoral theology

It cannot be emphasized too strongly that Christianity does not occupy its present position as a global faith on account of university faculties of theology or departments of religion. There is a strongly pastoral dimension to Christianity, which is generally inadequately reflected in the academic discussion of theology. Indeed, many scholars have argued that Latin American liberation theology represents an overdue correction of the excessively academic bias of western theology, with a healthy correction in the direction of social applicability. Theology is here seen as offering models for transformative action, rather than purely theoretical reflection.

This academic bias is, however, a recent development. Puritanism is an excellent instance of a movement which placed theological integrity alongside pastoral applicability, believing that each was incomplete without the other. The writings of Puritan theologians such as Richard Baxter and Jonathan Edwards are saturated with the belief that theology finds its true expression in pastoral care and the nurture of souls. In more recent years, this concern to ensure that theology finds its expression in pastoral care has led to a resurgence of interest in pastoral theology. Theology is here seen at its best and most authentic when it is applied – for example, in preaching, worship, prayer, and pastoral care.

Church history

An understanding of the development of the history of Christianity, especially its institutional elements, is widely regarded as an integral part of the discipline of theology. Students who intend to minister in a particular Christian tradition, or who are interested in deepening their understanding and appreciation of their own tradition, will find the history of that tradition to be of particular importance. Many church history courses include elements of historical theology. For example, it is very difficult to understand the origins and development of the European Reformation without some understanding of Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone, just as a lack of knowledge of the issues surrounding the Donatist controversy will make it hard to make sense of the history of the church in North Africa during the fourth century.

Nevertheless, church history must be considered as a discipline with its own integrity, despite this clear overlap of interest with historical theology. The Toleration Edict of Valerius (April 311) is of enormous importance in church history, in that it established Christianity as a legitimate religion within the Roman Empire, and opened the way to numerical growth and institutional advancement. Yet the Edict has little importance to historical theology in that it does not contribute *directly* to the development of theological reflection. To deal with the history of the church is to study cultural, social, political, and institutional factors which have shaped the development of the church down the ages. It is to study the emergence of institutions (such as the papacy, the episcopacy, and lay fraternities) and movements (such as Methodism, Pentecostalism, and the Cathars). Christianity is set within the flux of history, and church history aims to explore the particular place of Christian ideas, individuals, and institutions within that flux. That influence is two-way: Christianity both influences and is influenced by culture. The study of church history allows insights into history in general, as well as into theology in particular.

Historical Theology: Its Purpose and Place

Historical theology is the branch of theological inquiry which aims to explore the historical development of Christian doctrines, and identify the factors which were influential in their formulation and adoption. Historical theology therefore has direct and close links with the disciplines of church history and systematic theology, despite differing from them both. The relationship may be clarified as follows:

1. *Church history* is of major importance to historical theology, in that it identifies factors within the history of the Christian church which are of importance to understanding the development of aspects of Christian theology. Historical theology is the branch of theology which aims to explore the historical situations within which ideas developed or were specifically formulated. It aims to lay bare the connection between context and theology. For example, it demonstrates that it was no accident that the doctrine of justification by faith first became of foundational significance in the late Renaissance. It shows how, for example, the concept of salvation, found in Latin American liberation theology, is closely linked with the socioeconomic situation of the region. It illustrates how secular cultural trends – such as liberalism or conservatism – find their corresponding expression in theology. Church history and historical theology thus relate to each other in a positive and symbiotic manner.

2. *Systematic theology* aims to provide a contemporary statement of the leading themes of the Christian faith. A full understanding of the historical development of that doctrine is essential to its contemporary restatement. Yet historical theology does more than simply provide the background material to modern theological statements. It indicates the extent to which theological formulations are conditioned by the environment in which they emerge. Contemporary theological statements are no exception to this rule. Historical theology indicates the way in which ideas that were actively appropriated by one generation are often abandoned as an embarrassment by another.

Historical theology thus has both a *pedagogic* and a *critical* role, aiming to inform systematic theologians about what has been thought in the past (and why!), while identifying the factors that make some form of restatement necessary.

Theology has a history. This insight is too easily overlooked, especially by those of a more philosophical inclination. Christian theology can be regarded as an attempt to make sense of the foundational resources of faith in the light of what each day and age regards as first-rate methods. This means that local circumstances have a major impact upon theological formulations. Christian theology regards itself as universal, in that it is concerned with the application of God's saving action toward every period in history. Yet it is also characterized by its particularity as an experience of God's saving work in particular cultures, and is shaped by the insights and limitations of persons who were themselves seeking to live the gospel within a particular context. The universality of Christianity is thus complemented with – rather than contradicted by – its particular application.

The development of historical theology

The origins of historical theology are generally agreed to lie in the sixteenth century. The Reformation witnessed an intense debate over Christian authenticity, in which the continuity between both the Protestant and Catholic reformations and the early church came to be seen as critically important. As a result, writers on both sides of the debate found that they had to become familiar with both patristic theology and the modification of these ideas in the Middle Ages. Although this study was undertaken primarily for polemical reasons, it led to the production of a large number of works of reference in this field, including editions of the works of patristic writers.

A perhaps more important development took place during the eighteenth century, with the rise of the movement known as “the history of dogma,” usually known in its German form, *Dogmengeschichte*. The basic assumption of this movement was that the doctrinal formulations of the church (“dogmas”), especially during the patristic period, were heavily conditioned by the social and cultural conditions of the era. This conditioning, which could be uncovered and subjected to critical scrutiny and evaluation by historical methods, made such doctrinal formulations inappropriate for the modern church, which was obliged to develop restatements of these doctrines appropriate to the modern period. Historical research thus led to the “deconstruction” of such doctrines, allowing them to be reformulated in terms more suitable to the modern age.

This program can be seen in the writings of G. S. Steinbart (1738–1809), who argued that the Augustinian doctrine of original sin – foundational to traditional understandings of baptism and the work of Christ – was basically little more than a hangover from Augustine’s **Manichaean** period. It represented the intrusion of pagan ideas into Christianity, and had no place in a proper Christian theology. Steinbart’s analysis, which extended to include Anselm of Canterbury’s doctrine of the satisfaction of Christ, represents a classic instance of the criticism of dogma by a critical study of its origins.

In Manicheism, a distinction is drawn between two different divinities, one regarded as evil, the other as good.

This program, extended by writers such as F. C. Baur (1792–1860) and A. B. Ritschl (1822–89), reached its climax in the work of Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930). In his *History of Dogma* (which occupies seven volumes in English translation), Harnack argued that dogma was not itself a Christian notion. Rather, it arose through the expansion of Christianity from its original Palestinian background to a Hellenistic context, especially in the Greek-speaking city of Alexandria. As a result, Christian writers absorbed the Hellenistic tendency to conceptualize and use a metaphysical framework to articulate the gospel. Harnack saw the doctrine of the incarnation as perhaps the most obvious instance of the influence of Hellenism upon Christianity, and argued that historical analysis opened the way for its elimination. For Harnack, the gospel was about Jesus himself, and the impact which he had upon people. The shift from soteriology to the abstract metaphysical speculation of Christology is, for Harnack, an insidious yet reversible theological development. Harnack singled out Martin Luther as one who attempted to eliminate metaphysics from theology, and commended him as an example to posterity.

Although Harnack's thesis of the "Hellenization" of the gospel is now regarded as somewhat overstated, the general principles he developed are still regarded as valid. The historian of dogma can still discern areas of Christian theology in which a number of central conditioning assumptions appear to derive from Greek metaphysics. The modern debate about whether God can suffer (which we shall explore further below) has highlighted how the classical notion of the *apatheia* of God seems to rest upon the assumptions of Greek metaphysics, rather than the Old and New Testament witness to the acts of God in history.

Harnack's particular interest in historical theology rested on his belief that history provided a means for the correction or elimination of dogma. This "critical" function of historical theology remains important, and we shall explore it in more detail presently. Yet Harnack's massive amount of writing in this field also caused growing interest in the field of historical theology as a subject worthy of interest in its own right.

Historical theology as a pedagogic tool

Many students of church history neglect the role of ideas, in order to focus on the sociological, economic, and institutional aspect of this fascinating subject. Yet one can never hope to understand some of the most important episodes in that history without at least some understanding of the ideas that so influenced the course of church history. Just as a historian of the Russian Revolution cannot ignore the ideas of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, V. I. Lenin, and Leon Trotsky, so the church historian needs to understand the ideas of Athanasius, Augustine, and Luther (to name but three). Historical theology acts as a major resource to those studying church history, allowing them to understand the specific nature of the ideas which affected the church at critical periods in that history.

Historical theology does not, however, merely help us to understand the past; it is a resource for theology in the present. Many critics of modern theology have argued that the discipline behaves as if it were the first to deal with the issue in question, or that all previous attempts to wrestle with the issue could be disregarded completely. It is virtually impossible to do theology as if it had never been done before. There is always an element of looking over one's shoulder, to see how things were done in the past, and what answers were then given. Part of the notion of "tradition" is a willingness to take seriously the theological heritage of the past. The Swiss Protestant theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968) argues that theology necessarily involves a dialogue with the past:

We cannot be in the church without taking as much responsibility for the theology of the past as for the theology of the present. Augustine, Thomas Aquinas, Luther, Schleiermacher and all the rest are not dead but living. They still speak and demand a hearing as living voices, as surely as we know that they and we belong together in the church.

It is therefore of importance that the reader becomes familiar with the rich legacy of the Christian past, which provides vital reference points for the modern debate.

Historical theology thus provides an essential pedagogical resource for the contemporary statement of theology. The following points are of especial importance in this respect:

1. Historical theology provides us with a “state of the question” report on major theological themes, allowing us to identify what has already been discussed.
2. By studying the discussion of theological issues in the past, an understanding may be gained of both the strengths and weaknesses of existing approaches to questions.
3. Historical theology allows us to identify “landmarks” in the development of Christian thinking, which remain relevant and important today. Such “landmarks” include writers (such as Athanasius, Augustine, and Aquinas), debates (such as the Donatist and Arian controversies), and documents (such as the Nicene Creed).

In these ways and others, historical theology acts as an important pedagogical resource for systematic theology.

Historical theology as a critical tool

The study of the history of Christianity provides a powerful corrective to static views of theology. It allows us to see:

- that certain doctrines assume particular importance at various points in Christian history (for example, the doctrine of justification by faith during the sixteenth century);
- that certain ideas came into being under very definite circumstances; and that, occasionally, mistakes are made;
- that theological development is not irreversible; the mistakes of the past may be corrected.

A specific example will illustrate the importance of this point, and help identify some of the factors which impact on the development of theology. The question is whether God suffers. Writers of the first major era of Christian history (the patristic period) tended to answer this question in the negative. The answer that has tended to become the “new orthodoxy” since about 1945 has, however, been affirmative. So how is this difference to be explained?

The study of the history of theology suggests that Christianity can sometimes unconsciously absorb ideas and values from its cultural backdrop. Certain ideas which have often been regarded as distinctively Christian sometimes turn out to be borrowed from a secular context. The idea that God cannot suffer was well established in Greek philosophical circles. Early Christian theologians, anxious to gain respect and credibility in such circles, did not challenge this idea. As a result, it became deeply embedded in the Christian theological tradition.

The patristic discussion of this question is deeply influenced by the idea that God is perfect. According to contemporary classical philosophy, to be perfect is to be unchanging and self-sufficient. It is therefore impossible for a perfect being to be affected or changed by anything outside itself. Furthermore, perfection was understood in very static terms within classical philosophy. If God is perfect, change in any direction is an impossibility. If God changes, it is either a move *away from* perfection (in which case God is no longer perfect), or *toward* perfection (in which case, God was not perfect in the past). Aristotle, echoing such ideas, declared that “change would be

change for the worse,” and thus excluded his divine being from change and suffering.

This understanding passed into Christian theology at an early stage. Philo, a Hellenistic Jew whose writings were much admired by early Christian writers, wrote a treatise entitled *Quod Deus immutabilis sit*, “That God is unchangeable,” which vigorously defended the impassibility of God. Biblical passages that seemed to speak of God suffering were, he argued, to be treated as metaphors, and not to be allowed their full literal weight. To allow that God changes was to deny the divine perfection. “What greater impiety could there be than to suppose that the Unchangeable changes?” asked Philo. It seemed to be an unanswerable question. For Philo, God could not be allowed to suffer, or undergo anything which could be spoken of as “passion.” Anselm of Canterbury, influenced by this idea, argued that God was compassionate in terms of our experience, but not in terms of the divine being itself. The language of love and compassion is treated as purely figurative when used in relation to God.

However, this consensus has been challenged in the modern period. In part, the challenge results from a realization of the extent to which patristic thinking on this question has been influenced by Greek philosophical notions; in part, it also results from a realization that the Old Testament appears to speak of the suffering of God more than was appreciated. There are thus solid theological foundations to this tendency to affirm that God is able to suffer. But it must be appreciated that there are other factors at work, helping to dispose Christian theologians to giving a positive answer to that question: Does God suffer?

One pressure is cultural, and relates directly to the new cultural awareness of suffering in the world. The sheer horror of World War I made a deep impact upon western theological reflection. The suffering of the period led to a widespread perception that liberal Protestantism was fatally compromised by its optimistic views of human nature. It is no accident that dialectical theology, a movement that was vigorously critical of liberal Protestantism, arose in the aftermath of this trauma. Another significant response was the movement known as Protest Atheism, which raised a serious moral protest against belief in God. How could anyone believe in a God who was above such suffering and pain in the world?

Traces of such ideas can be found in Fyodor Dostoyevsky’s nineteenth-century novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. The ideas were developed more

fully in the twentieth century, often using Dostoyevsky's character Ivan Karamazov as a model. Karamazov's rebellion against God (or, perhaps more accurately, against the *idea* of God) has its origins in his refusal to accept that the suffering of an innocent child could ever be justified. Albert Camus developed such ideas in *The Rebel*, which expressed Karamazov's protest in terms of a "metaphysical rebellion." This intensely moral form of atheism seemed to many theologians to demand a credible theological response – a theology of a suffering God.

A second pressure arises from a shifting understanding of a central idea – in this case, the idea of "love." Theologians rooted in the classical tradition – such as Anselm and Aquinas – defined love in terms of expressions and demonstrations of care and goodwill toward others. It is thus perfectly possible to speak of God "loving impassibly" – that is, loving someone without being emotionally affected by that person's situation. Yet the new interest in the psychology of human emotions has raised questions over this notion of love. Can one really speak of "love," unless there is some mutual sharing of suffering and feelings? Surely "love" implies the lover's intense awareness of the suffering of the beloved, and thus some form of sharing in its distress? Such considerations have undermined the intuitive plausibility (yet not, interestingly, the intellectual credibility) of an impassible God.

This very brief analysis shows how theology can be influenced by philosophical trends, cultural shifts, and changes in psychology. Theological reflection always takes place against a complex background, and – whether this is appreciated or not! – incorporates aspects of that background into that reflection. Patristic reflections on whether God could suffer were significantly influenced by the prevailing philosophical consensus that a perfect being could not change or be affected by outside influences. Modern discussion of that same question is influenced by a cultural pressure to respond to the human experience of suffering, and a growing sympathy for the philosophical idea of God as a "fellow-sufferer" (Alfred North Whitehead). Whatever the "right" answer to this question may be – and that debate continues in modern theology – it is essential to appreciate the factors which exercise a significant (and sometimes unacknowledged) influence over theology.

Historical theology both documents the answers given to the great questions of Christian theology, and attempts also to account for the factors that have been significant in formulating those answers – whether those

factors were noticed or evaluated by those formulating the answers or not. The study of historical theology is thus subversive, as it indicates how easily theologians are led astray by the “self-images of the age” (Alasdair MacIntyre). Nor is this something that is restricted to the past! Too often, modern trends in theology are little more than knee-jerk reactions to short-term cultural trends. The study of history makes us alert to both the mistakes of the past, and the alarming way in which they are repeated in the present. “History repeats itself. It has to. Nobody listens the first time round” (Woody Allen).

It is for such reasons that the present volume aims to provide its readers with the maximum amount of historical background to theological debates, within the limits of the space available. All too often, theological issues are conducted as if the debate began yesterday. An understanding of how we got to be where we are is essential to an informed debate of such issues.

Historical theology as a resource for systematic theology

Finally, it is important to appreciate that systematic theology has much to learn from a detailed engagement with the history of the Christian tradition. As the more recent writings of Karl Barth and Karl Rahner make clear, some of the best contemporary theology can be thought of as critical reappropriation – in other words, making use of the wisdom of the past in present debates. The resurgence of interest in the writings of Augustine of Hippo and Thomas Aquinas in recent decades is a telling sign of the growing realization of the theological richness of the Christian tradition.

Historical theology gives us new ways of seeing things. It allows us to see debates and issues from other perspectives, helping us formulate our own approaches. The English literary critic C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) perhaps helps us understand how it opens our eyes, offering us new perspectives for evaluation and reflection.

My own eyes are not enough for me, I will see through those of others.
... In reading great literature, I become a thousand men and yet remain myself. Like the night sky in the Greek poem, I see with a myriad eyes, but it is still I who see.

Reading great literature, for Lewis, enables us “to see with other eyes, to imagine with other imaginations, to feel with other hearts, as well as our own.” The same is true of theological classics, such as Athanasius’s *On the Incarnation*, Augustine’s *Confessions*, Aquinas’s *Summa contra Gentiles*, or John Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion*. They offer us ways of seeing the theological task and its outcomes which help us to develop our own.

At times, this can go wrong – most notably, through a serious misreading of the past. For example, the British theologian Colin Gunton (1941–2003) developed an approach to Trinitarian theology which was severely critical of the approach of Augustine of Hippo, especially concerning the relationship between the doctrines of creation and redemption. Gunton constructed an alternative approach that he believed avoided Augustine’s mistakes. Yet Gunton’s historical analysis of Augustine’s position is highly questionable, involving a forced reading of texts and an apparent

misunderstanding of some of his ideas. All of these misapprehensions have been corrected by recent scholarship. Gunton's inaccurate reading of Augustine is an important reminder that good systematic theology depends on a good understanding of historical theology.

But we have spent enough time introducing our subject. It is time to plunge into the complex world of patristic theology, as we begin to explore the emergence of the Christian theological tradition.

1

The Patristic Period, c.100–451

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The patristic period is one of the most exciting and creative periods in the history of Christian thought. This feature alone is enough to ensure that it will continue to be the subject of study for many years to come. The period is also of importance for theological reasons. Every mainstream Christian body – including the Anglican, Eastern Orthodox, Lutheran, Reformed, and Roman Catholic churches – regards the patristic period as a definitive landmark in the development of Christian doctrine. Each of these theological traditions regards itself as continuing, extending, and, where necessary, criticizing the views of the early-church writers. For example, the leading seventeenth-century Anglican writer Lancelot Andrewes (1555–1626) declared that orthodox Christianity was based upon two testaments, three creeds, four gospels, and the first five centuries of Christian history. In what follows, we shall explore the basic features of this important period in the history of Christian thought.

A Clarification of Terms

The term “patristic” comes from the Latin word *pater*, “father,” and designates both the period of the church fathers, and the distinctive ideas which came to develop within this period. The term is non-inclusive; no generally acceptable inclusive term has yet to emerge in the literature. The following related terms are frequently encountered, and should be noted:

The patristic period: This is a vaguely defined entity, which is often taken to designate the period from the closing of the New Testament writings (c.100) to the definitive Council of Chalcedon (451).

Patristics: This term is usually understood to mean the branch of theological study that deals with the study of “the fathers” (*patres*).

Patrology: This term once literally meant “the study of the fathers” (in much the same way as “theology” meant “the study of God [*theos*]”). In recent years, however, the word has shifted its meaning. It now refers to a manual of patristic literature, such as that of the noted German scholar Johannes Quasten, which allows its readers easy access to the leading ideas of patristic writers and some of the problems of interpretation associated with them.

Difficulties in Approaching Patristic Theology

The patristic period is obviously of considerable importance to Christian theology. It is, however, found to be very difficult to understand by many modern students of theology. Four main reasons can be given for this situation:

1. Some of the debates of the period seem hopelessly irrelevant to the modern world. Although they were viewed as intensely important at the time, it is often very difficult for the modern reader to empathize with the issues and understand why they attracted such attention. It is interesting to contrast the patristic period with the Reformation era, which addressed many issues that are a continuing concern for the modern church; many teachers of theology find that their students are able to relate to the concerns of this later period much more easily.
2. Many of the patristic debates hinge upon philosophical issues, and only make sense if the reader has some familiarity with the philosophical debates of the period – especially the various schools of Platonism spread throughout the Mediterranean world of the period. Whereas at least some students of Christian theology have some familiarity with the ideas found in Plato's dialogues, these ideas were subject to considerable development and criticism in the Mediterranean world during the patristic period. Middle Platonism and Neoplatonism differ significantly from one another, and from Plato's original ideas. The strangeness of many of the philosophical ideas of the period acts as another barrier to its study, making it difficult for students beginning the study of theology to fully appreciate what is going on in some of the patristic debates.
3. The patristic period is characterized by immense doctrinal diversity. It was an age of flux, during which landmarks and standards – including documents such as the Nicene Creed and dogmas such as the two natures of Christ – emerged gradually. Students familiar with the relative stability of other periods in Christian doctrine (such as the

Reformation, in which the person of Christ was not a major issue) often find this feature of the patristic period disconcerting.

4. The period saw a major division arise, for both political and linguistic reasons, between the eastern Greek-speaking and the western Latin-speaking church. Many scholars discern a marked difference in theological temperament between theologians of the east and west: the former are often philosophically inclined and given to theological speculation, whereas the latter are often hostile to the intrusion of philosophy into theology, and regard theology as the exploration of the doctrines set out in Scripture. The famous rhetorical question of the western theologian Tertullian (c.160–c.225), “What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? or the Academy with the church?” illustrates this point. Many students of patristic theology find this bifurcation difficult, and tend to focus on either the thought of the eastern Greek-speaking or the western Latin-speaking church.

The Historical Background to Patristic Theology

The patristic period was of major importance in clarifying a number of issues. A task of initial importance was sorting out the relationship between Christianity and Judaism. The letters of Paul in the New Testament bear witness to the importance of this issue in the first century of Christian history, as a series of doctrinal and practical issues came to the fore. Should Gentile (that is, non-Jewish) Christians be obliged to be circumcised? And how was the Old Testament to be correctly interpreted?

However, other issues soon came to the fore. One which was of especial importance in the second century is that of apologetics – the reasoned defense and justification of the Christian faith against its critics. During the first period of Christian history, the church was often persecuted by the state. Its agenda was that of survival; there was limited place for theological disputes when the very existence of the Christian church could not be taken for granted. This observation helps us understand why apologetics came to be of such importance to the early church, through writers such as Justin Martyr (c.100–c.165), concerned to explain and defend the beliefs and practices of Christianity to a hostile pagan public. Although this early period produced some outstanding theologians – such as Irenaeus of Lyons (c.130–c.200) in the west, and Origen (c.185–c.254) in the east – theological debate could only begin in earnest once the church had ceased to be persecuted.

In view of the importance of the changing status of Christianity within the Roman Empire during the patristic period, we will consider the matter in more detail. Christianity had its origins in Palestine – more specifically, the region of Judea, especially the city of Jerusalem. Christianity regarded itself as a continuation and development of Judaism, and initially flourished in regions with which Judaism was traditionally associated, supremely Palestine. However, it rapidly spread to neighboring regions in which Judaism had a presence, partially through the efforts of early Christian evangelists such as Paul of Tarsus. By the end of the first century, Christianity appears to have become established throughout the eastern

Mediterranean world, and even to have gained a significant presence in the city of Rome, the capital of the Roman Empire.

The historical importance of the city of Rome

Rome was the administrative center of an empire which embraced the whole Mediterranean region. Indeed, the Romans tended to refer to the Mediterranean as “Mare Nostrum” – “our sea.” The region of Judea, in which Christianity had its origins, was part of this vast empire – and a rather insignificant part at that. Although the languages spoken in this region of the empire were Aramaic (a language closely related to Hebrew) and Greek, Latin was used for administrative purposes. John’s gospel makes reference to the charge against Jesus, to the effect that he claimed to be “king of the Jews,” being written in all three languages (John 19: 19–20). In many paintings and representations of the crucifixion of Jesus, this inscription is represented by four letters: INRI – the initial letters of the Latin phrase *Iesus Nazarenus Rex Iudaeorum*, meaning “Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.”

It is not clear when Christianity gained a presence in Rome, although it is generally thought that it dates from the 40s. Paul’s letter to the Romans, dating from around 57, refers to a number of individuals with Latin names, such as Urbanus, Aquila, Rufus, and Julia. This suggests that a number of Romans may have converted to the religion by this stage. The bulk of the names mentioned are Greek, reflecting the fact that Christianity seems initially to have been the religion of a Greek-speaking minority. There is evidence that Mark’s gospel may have been written in Rome at some point around 64, on the eve of Nero’s persecution of Christians in the city. For example, Mark 12: 42 notes that two Greek copper coins make one *quadrans*, a Roman coin not in circulation in the eastern part of the empire. Similarly, Mark 15: 16 explains that a Greek word corresponds to the Latin *praetorium*. These explanations suggest that Mark is explaining unfamiliar ideas or terms to a Roman audience.

The problem of persecution

Since becoming established in Rome in the 40s, Christianity had an ambiguous legal status. On the one hand, it was not legally recognized, and so did not enjoy any special rights; on the other, it was not forbidden. However, its growing numerical strength led to periodic attempts to suppress it by force. Sometimes these persecutions were local, restricted to regions such as North Africa; sometimes they were sanctioned throughout the Roman Empire as a whole. A particularly significant period of persecution dates from the accession of the emperor Decius in 249. His first major act of hostility toward Christianity was the execution of Fabian, bishop of Rome, in January 250. The Decian persecution resulted from the Edict of Decius, issued in June 250, which commanded provincial governors and magistrates to ensure that there was universal observance of the requirement to offer sacrifices to the Roman gods, and to the emperor. A certificate (*libellus pacis*) was issued to those who offered such sacrifices. The Edict seems to have been widely ignored, but was nevertheless enforced in some regions. Thousands of Christians were martyred during this difficult period. Some offered sacrifices to the gods in order to get hold of the required certificates; some were able to obtain the certificates without actually offering sacrifices.

The Decian persecution ended in June 251, when Decius was killed on a military expedition. The persecution led to many Christians lapsing or abandoning their faith in the face of persecution. Division arose immediately within the church over how these individuals should be treated: did such a lapse mark the end of their faith, or could they be reconciled to the church by penance? Opinions differed sharply, and serious disagreement and tension resulted. Very different views were promoted by Cyprian of Carthage and Novatian. Both of these writers were martyred during the persecution instigated by the emperor Valerian in 257–8.

One of the most severe outbursts of persecution came about in February 303, under the emperor Diocletian. An edict was issued ordering the destruction of all Christian places of worship, the surrender and destruction of all their books, and the cessation of all acts of Christian worship. Christian civil servants were to lose all privileges of rank or status and to be reduced to the status of slaves. Prominent Christians were forced to offer

sacrifice according to traditional Roman practices. It is an indication of how influential Christianity had become that Diocletian forced both his wife and daughter, who were known to be Christians, to comply with this order. The persecution continued under successive emperors, including Galerius, who ruled the eastern region of the empire.

In 311, Galerius ordered the cessation of the persecution. It had been a failure, and had merely hardened Christians in their resolve to resist the reimposition of classical Roman pagan religion. Galerius issued an edict which permitted Christians to live normally again and “hold their religious assemblies, provided that they do nothing which would disturb public order.” The edict explicitly identified Christianity as a religion, and offered it the full protection of the law. The legal status of Christianity, which had been ambiguous up to this point, was now resolved. The church no longer existed under a siege mentality.

The conversion of Constantine

Christianity was now a legal religion; it was, however, merely one among many such religions. The conversion of the emperor Constantine changed this irreversibly, and brought about a complete change in the situation of Christianity throughout the Roman Empire. Constantine was born to pagan parents in 285. (His mother would eventually become a Christian, apparently through her son's influence.) Although he showed no particular attraction to Christianity in his early period, Constantine certainly seems to have regarded tolerance as an essential virtue. Following Maxentius's seizure of power in Italy and North Africa, Constantine led a body of troops from western Europe in an attempt to gain authority in the region. The decisive battle took place on October 28, 312 at the Milvian Bridge, to the north of Rome. Constantine defeated Maxentius, and was proclaimed emperor. Shortly afterwards, he declared himself to be a Christian.

This point is affirmed by both Christian and pagan writers. What is not clear is precisely why or when this conversion took place. Some Christian writers (such as Lactantius and Eusebius) suggest that the conversion may have taken place before the decisive battle, with Constantine seeing a heavenly vision ordering him to place the sign of the cross on his soldiers' shields. Whatever the reasons for the conversion, and whether it dates from before or after the battle of Milvian Bridge, the reality and consequences of this conversion are not in doubt. Gradually, Rome became Christianized. On his own instructions, the statue of the emperor erected in the Forum depicts Constantine bearing a cross – “the sign of suffering that brought salvation,” according to the inscription provided by Constantine. In 321, Constantine decreed that Sundays should become public holidays. Christian symbols began to appear on Roman coins. Christianity was now more than just legitimate; it was on its way to becoming the established religion of the empire.

The development of public theological debate

As a result, constructive theological debate became a public affair. Apart from a brief period of uncertainty during the reign of Julian the Apostate (361–3), the church could now count upon the support of the state. Theology thus emerged from the hidden world of secret church meetings to become a matter of public interest and concern throughout the Roman Empire. Increasingly, doctrinal debates became a matter of both political and theological importance. Constantine wished to have a united church throughout his empire, and was thus concerned that doctrinal differences should be debated and settled as a matter of priority. As the church at Rome became increasingly powerful, tensions began to develop between the Christian leadership at Rome and at Constantinople, foreshadowing the later schism between the western and eastern churches arising out of these respective centers of power.

As Christianity became an established presence in the Mediterranean world, the stable conditions needed for serious theological reflection emerged. As a result, the later patristic period (from about 310 to 451) may be regarded as a high-water mark in the history of Christian theology. Theologians now enjoyed the freedom to work without the threat of persecution, and were able to address a series of issues of major importance to the consolidation of the emerging theological consensus within the churches. That consensus involved extensive debate, and a painful learning process in which the church discovered that it had to come to terms with disagreements and continuing tensions. Nonetheless, a significant degree of consensus, eventually to be enshrined in the ecumenical creeds, can be discerned as emerging within this formative period.

Centers of Theological Reflection

In addition to Rome and Constantinople, a number of regions emerged as significant centers of theological reflection during the patristic period. Three may be singled out as having especial importance, the first two of which were Greek-speaking, and the third Latin-speaking:

1. *The city of Alexandria* in modern-day Egypt, which emerged as a center of Christian theological education. A distinctive style of theology came to be associated with this city, reflecting its long-standing association with the Platonic tradition. The student will find reference to “Alexandrian” approaches in areas such as Christology and biblical interpretation (see pp. 46–9), reflecting both the importance and distinctiveness of the style of Christianity associated with the area.

2. *The city of Antioch* in ancient Syria, and the region of Cappadocia, in modern-day Turkey. A strong Christian presence came to be established in this northern region of the eastern Mediterranean at an early stage. Some of Paul’s missionary journeys related to this region, and Antioch features significantly at several points in the history of the very early church, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Antioch itself soon became a leading center of Christian thought. Like Alexandria, it became associated with particular approaches to Christology and biblical interpretation. The term “Antiochene” is often used to designate this distinct theological style. The “Cappadocian fathers” were also an important theological presence in this region in the fourth century, notable especially for their contribution to the doctrine of the Trinity.

3. *Western North Africa*, especially the area of modern-day Algeria. In the late classical period, this was the site of Carthage, a major Mediterranean city and at one time a political rival to Rome for dominance in the region. During the period when Christianity expanded in this region, it was a Roman colony. Major writers of the region include Tertullian, Cyprian of Carthage, and Augustine of Hippo.

This is not to say that other cities in the Mediterranean were devoid of significance. Milan and Jerusalem were also centers of Christian theological

reflection, even if neither was destined to achieve quite the significance of their rivals.

Key Theologians

During the course of this work, reference will be made to a significant number of theologians from the patristic period. The following six writers, however, are of especial importance, and deserve to be singled out for special mention.

Justin Martyr (c.100–c.165)

Justin is perhaps the greatest of the Apologists – the Christian writers of the second century who were concerned to defend Christianity in the face of intense criticism from pagan sources. In his “First Apology,” Justin argued that traces of Christian truth were to be found in the great pagan writers. His doctrine of the *logos spermatikos* (“seed-bearing word”) allowed him to affirm that God had prepared the way for his final revelation in Christ through hints of its truth in classical philosophy. Justin provides us with an important early example of a theologian who attempts to relate the gospel to the outlook of Greek philosophy, a trend especially associated with the eastern church.

Map 1.1 The Roman Empire and the church in the fourth century (note that modern rather than ancient place names are used)



Irenaeus of Lyons (c.130–c.200)

Irenaeus is believed to have been born in Smyrna (in modern-day Turkey), although he subsequently settled in Rome. He became Bishop of Lyons around 178, a position he held until his death two decades later. Irenaeus is noted especially for his vigorous defense of Christian orthodoxy in the face of a challenge from Gnosticism (see p. 28). His most significant work, “Against All Heresies” (*Adversus omnes haereses*), represents a major defense of the Christian understanding of salvation, and especially of the role of tradition in remaining faithful to the apostolic witness in the face of non-Christian interpretations.

Origen (c.185–c.254)

One of the most important defenders of Christianity in the third century, Origen provided an important foundation for the development of eastern Christian thought. His major contributions to the development of Christian theology can be seen in two general areas. In the field of biblical interpretation, Origen developed the notion of allegorical interpretation, arguing that the surface meaning of Scripture was to be distinguished from its deeper spiritual meaning. In the field of Christology, Origen established a tradition of distinguishing between the full divinity of the Father and a lesser divinity of the Son. Some scholars see **Arianism** as a natural consequence of this approach. Origen also adopted with some enthusiasm the idea of *apocatastasis* or universal restoration, according to which every creature – including both humanity and Satan – will be saved.

A major early heresy, which treated Jesus Christ as supreme amongst God's creatures and denied his divine status.

Tertullian (c.160–c.225)

Tertullian was originally a pagan from the North African city of Carthage, who converted to Christianity in his thirties. He is often regarded as the father of Latin theology, on account of the major impact he had upon the western church. He defended the unity of the Old and New Testaments against Marcion, who had argued that they related to different gods. In doing so, he laid the foundations for a doctrine of the **Trinity**. Tertullian was strongly opposed to making Christian theology or apologetics dependent upon extra-scriptural sources. He is amongst the most forceful early exponents of the principle of the sufficiency of Scripture, denouncing those who appeal to secular philosophies (such as those of the Athenian Academy) for a true knowledge of God.

Distinctively Christian doctrine of God, usually summarized in maxims such as “three persons, one God.”

Athanasius (c.296–c.373)

Athanasius's significance relates primarily to Christological issues, which became of major importance during the fourth century. Possibly while still in his twenties, Athanasius wrote the treatise *De incarnatione* ("On the Incarnation"), a powerful defense of the idea that God assumed human nature in the person of Jesus Christ. This issue proved to be of central importance in the Arian controversy (see pp. 41–6), to which Athanasius made a major contribution. Athanasius pointed out that if, as Arius argued, Christ was not fully God, a series of devastating implications followed. First, it was impossible for God to redeem humanity, as no creature could redeem another creature. And second, it followed that the Christian church was guilty of idolatry, as Christians regularly worshipped and prayed to Christ. As "idolatry" can be defined as "worship of a human construction or creation," it followed that this worship was idolatrous. Such arguments eventually carried the day, and led to the rejection of Arianism.

Augustine of Hippo (354–430)

In turning to deal with Aurelius Augustinus, usually known as “Augustine of Hippo” – or just plain “Augustine” – we encounter what is probably the greatest and most influential mind of the Christian church throughout its long history. Attracted to the Christian faith by the preaching of Bishop Ambrose of Milan, Augustine underwent a dramatic conversion experience. Having reached the age of 32 without satisfying his burning wish to know the truth, Augustine was agonizing over the great questions of human nature and destiny in a garden in Milan. He heard some children nearby singing a song based on the Latin words *Tolle, lege* (“take up and read”). Feeling that this was divine guidance, he found the New Testament document nearest to hand – Paul’s letter to the Romans, as it happened – and read the fateful words “clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 13: 14). This was the final straw for Augustine, whose paganism had become increasingly difficult to maintain. As he later recalled, “a light of certainty entered my heart, and every shadow of doubt vanished.” From that moment onward, Augustine dedicated his enormous intellectual abilities to the defense and consolidation of the Christian faith, writing in a style that was both passionate and intelligent, appealing to both heart and mind.

Possibly suffering from some form of asthma, Augustine left Italy to return to North Africa, and was made bishop of Hippo (in modern Algeria) in 395. The remaining 35 years of his life witnessed numerous controversies of major importance to the future of the Christian church in the west, and Augustine’s contribution to the resolution of each of these was decisive. His careful exposition of the New Testament, particularly the letters of Paul, gained him a reputation which continues today, as the “second founder of the Christian faith” (Jerome). When the Dark Ages finally lifted over western Europe, Augustine’s substantial body of theological writings would form the basis of a major program of theological renewal and development, consolidating his influence over the western church.

A major part of Augustine’s contribution lies in the development of theology as an academic discipline. The early church cannot really be said to have developed any “systematic theology.” Its primary concern was to defend Christianity against its critics (as in the apologetic works of Justin Martyr), and to clarify central aspects of its thinking against heresy (as in

the anti-Gnostic writings of Irenaeus). Nevertheless, major doctrinal development took place during the first four centuries, especially in relation to the doctrine of the person of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity.

Augustine's contribution was to achieve a synthesis of Christian thought, supremely in his major treatise *De civitate Dei* ("On the City of God"). Like Charles Dickens's famous novel, Augustine's "City of God" is a tale of two cities – the city of the world, and the city of God. The work is apologetic in tone: Augustine is sensitive to the charge that the fall of Rome was due to its having abandoned classic paganism in favor of Christianity. Yet as he defended Christianity against such charges, he inevitably ended up by giving a systematic presentation and exposition of the main lines of Christian belief.

However, in addition, Augustine may also be argued to have made key contributions to three major areas of Christian theology: the doctrine of the church and sacraments, arising from the Donatist controversy (see pp. 62–7); the doctrine of grace, arising from the Pelagian controversy (see pp. 67–73); and the doctrine of the Trinity (see pp. 53–62). Interestingly, Augustine never really explored the area of Christology (that is, the doctrine of the person of Christ), which would unquestionably have benefited from his considerable wisdom and acumen.

Key Theological Developments

The following areas of theology were explored with particular vigor during the patristic period.

The relation of Christian faith and classical culture

The later patristic period saw considerable thought being given to an issue of major importance for Christian theology – the extent to which Christian writers could make use of existing secular approaches to rhetoric, literature, and poetry in developing a Christian literature. Initially, there was considerable hostility toward the use of such approaches. The secular establishment seemed dedicated to the eradication of Christianity; how, then, could Christian writers use its cultural norms with any degree of integrity? To employ the cultural values of an oppressor seemed to be tantamount to capitulation to those opposed to Christianity.

Yet, with the conversion of Constantine, a distinct change of mood appears to have gained the ascendancy. No longer was classical Roman culture seen as embodying the values of an oppressor. At worst, the classical culture of the period was to be seen as neutral; increasingly, many came to see it as an ally. The issue of the interaction of Christianity and classical culture now assumed a new significance. Rome was now the servant of the gospel; might not the same be true of its culture? If the Roman state could be viewed positively by Christians, why not also its cultural heritage? It seemed as if a door had opened upon some very interesting possibilities. Prior to 313, this possibility could only have been dreamt of. After 313, its exploration became a matter of urgency for leading Christian thinkers.

The approach developed by Augustine of Hippo in the final years of the Roman Empire gained wide support. This can perhaps be best described as the “critical appropriation of classical culture.” For Augustine, the situation is comparable to Israel fleeing from captivity in Egypt at the time of the Exodus. Although they left the idols of Egypt behind them, they carried the gold and silver of Egypt with them, in order to make better and proper use of such riches, which were thus liberated in order to serve a higher purpose than before.

In much the same way, the philosophy and culture of the ancient world could be appropriated by Christians, where this seemed right, and thus allowed to serve the cause of the Christian faith. Appropriation involved a

filtering process, retaining what was good and rejecting what was useless or burdensome. This gave intellectual justification to the growing tendency to make extensive use of secular literary resources and encourage a process of engagement and appropriation which can be seen as underlying the emergence of a significant Christian literature.

The extent of the New Testament canon

From its outset, Christian theology recognized itself to be grounded in Scripture. There was, however, some uncertainty as to what the term “Scripture” actually designated. The patristic period witnessed a process of decision making, in which limits were laid down to the New Testament – a process usually known as “the fixing of the canon.” The word “canon” needs explanation. It derives from the Greek word *kanon*, meaning “a rule” or “a fixed reference point.” The “canon of Scripture” refers to a limited and defined group of writings, which are accepted as authoritative within the Christian church. The term “canonical” is used to refer to scriptural writings accepted to be within the canon. Thus the Gospel of Luke is referred to as “canonical,” whereas the Gospel of Thomas is “extra-canonical” (that is, lying outside the canon of Scripture).

For the writers of the New Testament, the term “Scripture” meant primarily a writing of the Old Testament. However, within a short period, early Christian writers (such as Justin Martyr) were referring to the “New Testament” (to be contrasted with the “Old Testament”), and insisting that both were to be treated with equal authority. By the time of Irenaeus, it was generally accepted that there were four gospels; by the late second century, there was a consensus that the gospels, Acts, and letters had the status of inspired Scripture. Thus Clement of Alexandria recognized four gospels, the Acts, 14 letters of Paul (the letter to the Hebrews being regarded as Pauline), and Revelation. Tertullian declared that alongside the “law and the prophets” were the “evangelical and apostolic writings” (*evangelicae et apostolicae litterae*), which were both to be regarded as authoritative within the church. Gradually, agreement was reached on the list of books that were recognized as inspired Scripture, and the order in which they were to be arranged. In 367, Athanasius circulated his thirty-ninth Festal Letter, which identifies the 27 books of the New Testament, as we now know it, as being canonical.

Debate centered especially on a number of books. The western church had hesitations about including Hebrews, in that it was not specifically attributed to an apostle; the eastern church had reservations about

Revelation. Four of the smaller books (2 Peter, 2 and 3 John, and Jude) were often omitted from early lists of New Testament writings. Some writings now outside the canon were regarded with favor in parts of the church, although they ultimately failed to gain universal acceptance as canonical. Examples of this include the first letter of Clement (an early bishop of Rome, who wrote around 96) and the *Didache*, a short early Christian manual on morals and church practices, probably dating from the first quarter of the second century.

The arrangement of the material was also subject to considerable variation. Agreement was reached at an early stage that the gospels should have the place of honor within the canon, followed by the Acts of the Apostles. The eastern church tended to place the seven “Catholic letters” (that is, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, and Jude) before the 14 Pauline letters (Hebrews being accepted as Pauline), whereas the western church placed Paul’s letters immediately after Acts, and followed them with the Catholic letters. Revelation ended the canon in both east and west, although its status was subject to debate for some time within the eastern church.

What criteria were used in drawing up the canon? The basic principle appears to have been that of the recognition rather than the imposition of authority. In other words, the works in question were recognized as already possessing authority, rather than having an arbitrary authority imposed upon them. For Irenaeus, the church does not create the canon; it acknowledges, conserves, and receives canonical Scripture on the basis of the authority which is already inherent in it. Some early Christians appear to have regarded apostolic authorship as of decisive importance; others were prepared to accept books which did not appear to have apostolic credentials. However, although the precise details of how the selection was made remain unclear, it is certain that the canon was closed within the western church by the beginning of the fifth century. The issue of the canon would not be raised again until the time of the Reformation.

The role of tradition

The early church was confronted with a major challenge from a movement known as Gnosticism. This diverse and complex movement, not dissimilar to the modern New Age phenomenon, achieved considerable influence in the late Roman Empire. The basic ideas of Gnosticism do not concern us at this point; what is of relevance here is that Gnosticism appeared very similar to Christianity at many points. For this reason, it was viewed as a major challenge by many early Christian writers, especially Irenaeus. Furthermore, Gnostic writers had a tendency to interpret New Testament passages in a manner that dismayed Christian leaders, and prompted questions about the correct manner of interpretation of Scripture.

In such a context, an appeal to tradition became of major importance. The word “tradition” literally means “that which has been handed down or over,” although it can also refer to “the act of handing down or over.” Irenaeus insisted that the “rule of faith” (*regula fidei*) was faithfully preserved by the apostolic church, and that it had found its expression in the canonical books of Scripture. The church had faithfully proclaimed the same gospel from the time of the Apostles until the present day. The Gnostics had no such claim to continuity with the early church. They had merely invented new ideas, and were improperly suggesting that these were “Christian.” Irenaeus thus emphasized the continuity of the teaching and preaching office of the church and its officials (especially its bishops). Tradition came to mean “a traditional interpretation of Scripture” or “a traditional presentation of the Christian faith,” which is reflected in the creeds of the church and in its public doctrinal pronouncements. This fixing of the creeds as a public expression of the teaching of the church is of major importance, as will become clear in the following section.

Tertullian adopted a related approach. Scripture, he argued, is capable of being understood clearly, provided that it is read as a whole. However, he conceded that controversy over the interpretation of certain passages was inevitable. Heretics, he observed gloomily, can make Scripture say more or less anything they like. For this reason, the tradition of the church was of considerable importance, as it indicated the manner in which Scripture had been received and interpreted within the church. The right interpretation of Scripture was thus to be found where true Christian faith and discipline had

been maintained. A similar view was taken by Athanasius, who argued that Arius's Christological mistakes would never have arisen if he had remained faithful to the church's interpretation of Scripture.

Tradition was thus seen as a legacy from the Apostles, by which the church was guided and directed toward a correct interpretation of Scripture. It was not seen as a "secret source of revelation" in addition to Scripture, an idea that Irenaeus dismissed as "Gnostic." Rather, it was seen as a means of ensuring that the church remained faithful to the teaching of the Apostles, instead of adopting idiosyncratic interpretations of Scripture.

The fixing of the ecumenical creeds

The English word “creed” derives from the Latin word *credo*, “I believe,” with which the Apostles’ Creed – probably the most familiar of all the creeds – begins: “I believe in God ...” It has come to refer to a statement of faith, summarizing the main points of Christian belief, which is common to all Christians. For this reason, the term “creed” is never applied to statements of faith associated with specific denominations. These latter are often referred to as “confessions” (such as the Lutheran Augsburg Confession or the Reformed Westminster Confession of Faith). A “confession” pertains to a denomination, and includes specific beliefs and emphases relating to that denomination; a “creed” pertains to the entire Christian church, and includes nothing more and nothing less than a statement of beliefs which every Christian ought to be able to accept and be bound by. A “creed” has come to be recognized as a concise, formal, and universally accepted and authorized statement of the main points of Christian faith.

The patristic period saw two creeds coming to be treated with particular authority and respect throughout the church. The stimulus to their development appears to have been the felt need to provide a convenient summary of Christian faith suitable for public occasions, of which perhaps the most important was baptism. The early church tended to baptize its converts on Easter Day, using the period of Lent as a time of preparation and instruction for this moment of public declaration of faith and commitment. An essential requirement was that each convert who wished to be baptized should declare his or her faith in public. It seems that creeds began to emerge as a uniform declaration of faith which converts could use on such occasions.

The Apostles' Creed

The document known as the "Apostles' Creed" is widely used in the western church as a succinct summary of the leading themes of the Christian faith. Its historical evolution is complex, with its origins lying in declarations of faith which were required of those who wanted to be baptized. The 12 individual statements of this creed, which seems to have assumed its final form in the eighth century, are traditionally ascribed to individual apostles, although there is no historical justification for this belief. During the twentieth century, the Apostles' Creed has become widely accepted by most churches, eastern and western, as a binding statement of Christian faith despite the fact that its statements concerning the "descent into hell" and the "communion of saints" (here printed within square brackets) are not found in eastern versions of the work.

1. I believe in God, the Father almighty, creator of the heavens and earth;
2. and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord;
3. who was conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary;
4. suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried; [he descended to hell;]
5. on the third day he was raised from the dead;
6. he ascended into the heavens, and sits at the right hand of God the Father almighty;
7. from where he will come to judge the living and the dead.
8. I believe in the Holy Spirit;
9. in the holy Catholic church; [the communion of saints;]
10. the forgiveness of sins;
11. the resurrection of the flesh;
12. and eternal life.

The *Apostles' Creed* is probably the most familiar form of the creed known to western Christians. It falls into three main sections, dealing with God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. There is also material relating to the church, judgment, and resurrection.

The *Nicene Creed* (more strictly known as the "Niceno-Constantinopolitan creed") is a longer creedal statement that includes additional material relating to the person of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit. In response to the controversies concerning the divinity of Christ, this creed includes strong affirmations of his unity with God, including the expressions "God from God" and "being of one substance with the Father."

The development of the creeds was an important element in the move toward achieving a doctrinal consensus within the early church. One area of doctrine which witnessed considerable development and controversy related to the person of Christ, to which we may now turn.

The two natures of Jesus Christ

The two doctrines to which the patristic period may be argued to have made a decisive contribution relate to the person of Christ (an area of theology which, as we noted, is generally designated “Christology”) and the nature of the Godhead. These two developments are organically related to one another. By 325, the early church had come to the conclusion that Jesus was “of one substance” (*homoousios*) with God. (The term *homoousios* can also be translated as “one in being” or “consubstantial.”) The implications of this Christological statement were twofold: in the first place, it consolidated at the intellectual level the spiritual importance of Jesus Christ to Christians; in the second, however, it posed a powerful challenge to simplistic conceptions of God. For if Jesus is recognized as “being of the same substance” as God, then the entire doctrine of God has to be reconsidered in the light of this belief. For this reason, the historical development of the doctrine of the Trinity dates from after the emergence of a Christological consensus within the church. Only when the divinity of Christ could be treated as an agreed and assured starting point could theological speculation on the nature of God begin.

The Christological debates of the early church took place largely in the eastern Mediterranean world, and were conducted in the Greek language, and often in the light of the presuppositions of major Greek schools of philosophy. In practical terms, this means that many of the central terms of the Christological debates of the early church are Greek, often with a history of use within the Greek philosophical tradition.

The main features of patristic Christology will be considered in some detail at pp. 41–52, to which the reader is referred. At this early stage, however, we may summarize the main landmarks of the patristic Christological debate in terms of two schools, two debates, and two councils, as follows:

1. *Schools*: The Alexandrian school tended to place emphasis upon the divinity of Christ, and interpret that divinity in terms of “the word becoming incarnate.” A scriptural text that was of central importance to this school is John 1: 14, “the word became flesh, and dwelt among us.” This emphasis upon the idea of incarnation led to the festival of Christmas being seen as especially important. The Antiochene school,

however, placed a corresponding emphasis upon the humanity of Christ, and attached especial importance to his moral example (see pp. 49–53).

2. *Debates*: The Arian controversy of the fourth century is widely regarded as one of the most significant in the history of the Christian church. Arius (c.250–c.336) argued that the scriptural titles for Christ, which appeared to point to his being of equal status with God, were merely courtesy titles. Christ was to be regarded as a creature, although nevertheless as preeminent amongst other creatures. This provoked a hostile response from Athanasius, who argued that the divinity of Christ was of central importance to the Christian understanding of salvation (an area of theology known as “soteriology”). Arius’s Christology was, he declared, inadequate soteriologically. Arius’s Christ could not redeem fallen humanity. In the end, Arianism (the movement associated with Arius) was declared to be heretical. This was followed by the Apollinarian debate, which centered on Apollinaris of Laodicea (c.310–c.390). A vigorous opponent of Arius, Apollinaris argued that Christ could not be regarded as being totally human. In Christ’s case, the human spirit was replaced by the divine Logos. As a result, Christ did not possess full humanity. This position was regarded as severely deficient by writers such as Gregory of Nazianzus, since it implied that Christ could not fully redeem human nature (see pp. 57–63).

3. *Councils*: The Council of Nicea (325) was convened by Constantine, the first Christian emperor, with a view to sorting out the destabilizing Christological disagreements within his empire. This was the first “ecumenical council” (that is, an assembly of Christians drawn from the entire Christian world, whose decisions are regarded as normative for the churches). Nicea (now the city of Iznik in modern-day Turkey) settled the Arian controversy by affirming that Jesus was *homoousios* (“one in being” or “of one substance”) with the Father, thus rejecting the Arian position in favor of a vigorous assertion of the divinity of Christ. The Council of Chalcedon (451), the fourth ecumenical council, confirmed the decisions of Nicea, and responded to new debates which had subsequently erupted over the humanity of Christ.

The doctrine of the Trinity

Once the Christological debates of the early church had been settled, the consequences of those decisions were explored. In this intensely creative and interesting period of Christian theology, the doctrine of the Trinity began to emerge in a recognizable form. The basic feature of this doctrine is that there are three persons within the Godhead – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – and that these are to be regarded as equally divine and of equal status. The co-equality of Father and Son was established through the Christological debates leading up to the Council of Nicea; the divinity of the Spirit was established in the aftermath of this, especially through the writings of Athanasius and Basil of Caesarea.

The main thrust of the Trinitarian debates increasingly came to concern the manner in which the Trinity was to be understood, rather than its fundamental validity. Two quite distinct approaches gradually emerged, one associated with the eastern, and the other with the western, churches.

The eastern position, which continues to be of major importance within the Greek and Russian Orthodox churches of today, was developed especially by a group of three writers, based in modern-day Turkey. Basil of Caesarea (c.330–79), Gregory of Nazianzus (329–89), and Gregory of Nyssa (c.330–c.395), known as the Cappadocian fathers, began their reflections on the Trinity by considering the different ways in which the Father, Son, and Spirit are experienced. The western position, especially associated with Augustine of Hippo, began from the unity of God, and proceeded to explore the implications of the love of God for our understanding of the nature of the Godhead. These positions will be explored in greater detail at the appropriate point in this work (see pp. 53–62).

The doctrine of the Trinity represents a rare instance of a theological issue of concern to both the eastern and western churches. Our attention now shifts to two theological debates which were specifically linked with the western church and have both come to be particularly associated with Augustine of Hippo.

The doctrine of the church

A major controversy within the western church centered on the question of the holiness of the church. The Donatists were a group of native African Christians, based in modern-day Algeria, who resented the growing influence of the Roman church in northern Africa. The Donatists argued that the church was a body of saints, within which sinners had no place. The issue became of especial importance on account of the persecution undertaken by the emperor Diocletian in 303, which persisted until the conversion of Constantine in 313. During this persecution, in which the possession of Scripture was illegal, a number of Christians handed in their copies of Scripture to the authorities. These people were immediately condemned by others who had refused to cave in under such pressure. After the persecution died down, many of these *traditores* – literally, “those who handed over [their Scriptures]” – rejoined the church. The Donatists argued for their exclusion.

Augustine argued otherwise, declaring that the church must expect to remain a “mixed body” of saints and sinners, and refusing to weed out those who had lapsed under persecution or for other reasons. The validity of the church’s ministry and preaching did not depend upon the holiness of its ministers, but upon the person of Jesus Christ. The personal unworthiness of a minister did not compromise the validity of the sacraments. This view, which rapidly became normative within the church, has had a deep impact upon Christian thinking about the nature of the church and its ministers.

The Donatist debate, which will be explored in greater detail elsewhere, was the first to center on the question of the doctrine of the church (known as “ecclesiology”) and related questions, such as the way in which sacraments function. Many of the issues raised by the controversy would surface again at the time of the Reformation, when ecclesiological issues would once more come to the fore (see pp. 171–7). The same may be said of the doctrine of grace, to which we now turn.

The doctrine of grace

The doctrine of grace had not been an issue of significance in the development of theology in the Greek-speaking eastern church. However, an intense controversy broke out over this question in the second decade of the fifth century. Pelagius, a British ascetic monk based at Rome, argued forcefully for the need for human moral responsibility. Alarmed at the moral laxity of the Roman church, he insisted upon the need for constant self-improvement, in the light of the Old Testament law and the example of Christ. In doing so, he seemed to his opponents – chief among whom was Augustine – to deny any real place to divine grace in the beginning or continuation of the Christian life. Pelagianism came to be seen as a religion of human autonomy, which held that human beings are able to take the initiative in their own salvation.

Augustine reacted forcefully against Pelagianism, insisting upon the priority of the grace of God at every stage in the Christian life, from its beginning to its end. Human beings did not, according to Augustine, possess the necessary freedom to take the initial steps toward salvation. Far from possessing “freedom of the will,” humans were in possession of a will that was corrupted and tainted by sin, and which biased them toward evil and away from God. Only the grace of God could counteract this bias toward sin. So forceful was Augustine’s defense of grace that he later became known as “the doctor of grace” (*doctor gratiae*).

A central theme of Augustine’s thought is the fallenness of human nature. The imagery of “the Fall” derives from Genesis 3, and expresses the idea that human nature has “fallen” from its original pristine state. The present state of human nature is thus not what it is intended to be by God. The created order no longer directly corresponds to the “goodness” of its original integrity. It has lapsed. It has been spoiled and ruined – but not irredeemably, as the doctrines of salvation and justification affirm. The image of a “Fall” conveys the idea that creation now exists at a lower level than that intended for it by God.

According to Augustine, it follows that all human beings are now contaminated by sin from the moment of their birth. In contrast to many twentieth-century existentialist philosophies (such as that of Martin Heidegger), which affirm that “fallenness” (*Verfallenheit*) is an option

which we choose (rather than something which is chosen for us), Augustine portrays sin as inherent to human nature. It is an integral, not an optional, aspect of our being. This insight, which is given more rigorous expression in Augustine's doctrine of original sin, is of central importance to his doctrines of sin and salvation. In that all are sinners, all require redemption. In that all have fallen short of the glory of God, all require to be redeemed.

For Augustine, humanity, left to its own devices and resources, could never enter into a relationship with God. Nothing that a man or woman could do was sufficient to break the stranglehold of sin. To use an image which Augustine was fortunate enough never to have encountered, it is like a narcotic addict trying to break free from the grip of heroin or cocaine. The situation cannot be transformed from within – and so, if transformation is to take place, it must come from outside the human situation. According to Augustine, God intervenes in the human dilemma. He need not have done so, but out of his love for fallen humanity, he entered into the human situation in the person of Jesus Christ in order to redeem it.

Augustine held “grace” to be the unmerited or undeserved gift of God, by which God voluntarily breaks the hold of sin upon humanity. Redemption is possible only as a divine gift. It is not something which we can achieve ourselves, but is something which has to be done for us. Augustine thus emphasizes that the resources of salvation are located outside of humanity, in God himself. It is God who initiates the process of salvation, not men or women.

For Pelagius, however, the situation looked very different. Pelagius taught that the resources of salvation are located within humanity. Individual human beings have the capacity to save themselves. They are not trapped by sin, but have the ability to do all that is necessary to be saved. Salvation is something which is earned through good works, which place God under an obligation to humanity. Pelagius marginalizes the idea of grace, understanding it in terms of demands made of humanity by God in order that salvation may be achieved – such as the Ten Commandments, or the moral example of Christ. The ethos of Pelagianism could be summed up as “salvation by merit,” whereas Augustine taught “salvation by grace.”

It will be obvious that these two different theologies involve very different understandings of human nature. For Augustine, human nature is weak, fallen, and powerless; for Pelagius, it is autonomous and self-sufficient. For Augustine, humanity must depend upon God for salvation;

for Pelagius, God merely indicates what has to be done if salvation is to be attained, and then leaves men and women to meet those conditions unaided. For Augustine, salvation is an unmerited gift; for Pelagius, salvation is a justly earned reward.

One aspect of Augustine's understanding of grace needs further comment. As human beings were incapable of saving themselves, and as God gave his gift of grace to some (but not all), it followed that God had "preselected" those who would be saved. Developing hints of this idea to be found in the New Testament, Augustine developed a doctrine of predestination. The term "predestination" refers to God's original or eternal decision to save some, and not others. It was this aspect of Augustine's thought which many of his contemporaries, not to mention his successors, found unacceptable. It need hardly be said that there is no direct equivalent in Pelagius's thought.

The Council of Carthage (418) decided for Augustine's views on grace and sin, and condemned Pelagianism in uncompromising terms. However, Pelagianism, in various forms, continued to be a point of contention for some time to come. As the patristic era came to its close, with the Dark Ages settling over western Europe, many of the issues remained unresolved. They would be taken up again during the Middle Ages, and supremely at the time of the Reformation (see pp. 154–64).

Key Names, Words, and Phrases

By the end of this chapter you will have encountered the following terms, which will recur during the work. Ensure that you are familiar with them! They have been capitalized as you are likely to encounter them in normal use.

Apollinarianism

Arianism

Augustinianism

canon

canonical

Cappadocian fathers

Christological

Christology

creed

Donatism

Donatist

ecclesiological

ecclesiology

ecumenical council

extra-canonical

incarnation

patristic

patrology

Pelagian

Pelagianism

soteriology

Trinity

Trinitarian

Questions

1. Locate the following cities or regions on [Map 1.1](#) (p. 23): Alexandria; Antioch; Cappadocia; Constantinople; Hippo; Jerusalem; Rome.
2. Now find the Latin/Greek dividing line on the same map. Latin was the main language west of that line, and Greek east of it. Identify the predominant language in each of the cities mentioned in question 1.
3. Which language would you associate with the following writers: Athanasius; Augustine of Hippo; Origen; Tertullian?
4. The following movements were of major importance during the patristic period: Arianism; Donatism; Gnosticism; Pelagianism. Associate the controversies centering on each of these movements with one of the following theologians: Athanasius; Augustine of Hippo; Irenaeus of Lyons. (Note that one of these theologians is associated with more than one controversy.)
5. Why was there relatively little interest in the doctrine of the church in this early period?

Case Studies

Case study 1.1 The Bible and tradition

A major issue of theological debate throughout Christian history concerns the way in which the Bible is interpreted. There have always been those who believed that an issue of Christian doctrine could be settled simply by an appeal to the Bible. However, the great theological debates of the patristic period showed that this approach was seriously flawed. Arianism and Pelagianism – both of which would be condemned as heretical, although for very different reasons – appealed to an impressive array of biblical texts in support of their teachings. Their opponents, however, argued that their interpretation of these texts was incorrect. It was not enough simply to quote the Bible; it was necessary to interpret it in an orthodox manner. But who decides what is an orthodox interpretation, and what is not? What resources can be appealed to in an attempt to establish the correct interpretation of a biblical passage?

Such debates have taken place throughout the history of Christian thought, but were of particular importance at the time of the Reformation. However, the patristic period saw an especially important answer to such questions being formulated. For many patristic writers, an appeal to tradition was of major importance in challenging unorthodox interpretations of Scripture or teachings. In what follows, we shall explore the contributions of three writers to this debate: Irenaeus (second century), Tertullian (third century), and Vincent of Lérins (fifth century). We begin, however, by noting the way in which the idea of “tradition” is embedded in the New Testament itself.

In its earliest period, Christianity was spread through the oral transmission of a more or less fixed body of teaching. The term “tradition” derives from the Latin word *traditio*, which literally means “handing down” or “handing over.” The study of early Christianity indicates that the basic elements of the Christian faith were “handed over” from one teacher to another. Paul, writing to the church at Corinth, makes reference to “passing on” certain key themes to his audience (1 Corinthians 15: 1–4), a clear

reference to the verbal transmission of central elements of the Christian message, especially the death and resurrection of Christ.

It is also known that the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke are based on collections of material which were transmitted orally, before they were finally committed to writing in what are now known as the “synoptic gospels.” Thus the opening of Luke’s gospel makes reference to using reports “just as they were handed over to us by those who were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word from the beginning” (Luke 1: 1–2). The general consensus within New Testament scholarship is that four sources can be discerned for the synoptic gospels:

1. Mark’s gospel itself, which seems to be used as a source by Matthew and Luke. Thus 90 percent of the contents of Mark’s gospel are included in Matthew; 53 percent of Mark can be found in Luke. Mark’s material is written in a style that suggests that it is older than the style found in the corresponding passages in Matthew or Luke, using many Semitic phrases. It is very difficult to explain this observation on the basis of any hypothesis other than that Matthew and Luke both based themselves on Mark, and “tidied up” his style.
2. Material common to both Matthew and Luke. This section of material, which is about 200 verses in length, is generally referred to as “Q.” There is no evidence that Q was a complete gospel in itself, or that it existed as an independent written source.
3. Material found only in Matthew (usually known as “M”).
4. Material found only in Luke (usually known as “L”).

The most widely accepted explanation of the way in which the three synoptic gospels were compiled was developed in detail in its current form at the University of Oxford in the opening decade of the twentieth century. Its most celebrated statements can be found in B. H. Streeter’s *Four Gospels* (1924) and W. Sanday’s *Studies in the Synoptic Problem* (1911).

Streeter’s work represents a collection of papers reflecting the work of the Oxford gospel seminar, which met nine times a year over a period of 15 years. Although this theory is sometimes known as “the Oxford hypothesis,” it is more commonly referred to as “the two-source theory.” Its basic features can be set out as follows.

Mark was the first gospel to be written down. It was available to both Matthew and Luke, who used it as a source, altering the style of the

language as appropriate, but retaining Mark's ordering of the material. Matthew was written after Mark, but before Luke. Both Matthew and Luke had access to the source known as Q. In addition, Matthew had access to another source known as M; Luke had access to a different source, known as L. Although this theory acknowledges four sources (Mark, Q, M, and L), it is known as the "two-source" theory on account of the importance of Mark and Q in relation to its approach.

This theory has found much support in modern New Testament scholarship. However, it is by no means the only theory to command support. For example, some scholars deny the existence of Q, and argue that Luke simply used Matthew as a source. J. J. Griesbach developed an influential hypothesis, according to which Matthew was written first, followed by Luke (who used Matthew). Finally, Mark was written, making use of both Matthew and Luke. It must also be stressed that the "synoptic problem" concerns our understanding of the way in which the oral traditions concerning Jesus were passed down to us. It does not call their historical accuracy or theological reliability into question, but allows a deeper understanding of the formative period of the gospel traditions, in which the words and deeds of Jesus were passed down and handed over during the period c.30–60.

Our concern in this case study, however, relates to a slightly different issue concerning the idea of "tradition," which became of major importance during the second century. A movement known as "Gnosticism" emerged as a major threat to the Christian church during this period, partly on account of the fact that its teachings were (at least superficially) similar to those of Christianity itself. Many Gnostic writers argued that salvation was achieved through access to a secret teaching, which alone ensured that believers would be saved. The "secret knowledge" in question, for some Gnostic writers, was almost like a form of "cosmic password." When someone died, their spirit was liberated from its physical prison, and it was free to begin its long and complex journey to its final and glorious destination. To get there, it needed to get past a series of potential obstacles, for which the "secret knowledge" was required.

Some Gnostic writers argued that this secret oral teaching had been passed down from the apostles, and that it was to be found in a "veiled" form in the Bible. Only those who knew how to read the Bible in a certain way could gain access to this knowledge, which was not publicly available.

Only those who were initiated into the mysteries of Gnosticism could therefore hope to benefit from the salvation which the New Testament offered.

It was clearly of major importance for the Christian church to rebut this teaching. It implied that, while the church had access to the Bible, it did not have access to the special way of reading and interpreting the Bible which was required if its true meaning was to be understood. Perhaps more importantly, the salvation which the New Testament promised was only available to those who had access to the secret traditions of Gnosticism. In response to the threat from Gnosticism, a “traditional” method of understanding certain passages of Scripture began to develop. Second-century patristic theologians such as Irenaeus of Lyons began to develop the idea of an authorized way of interpreting certain texts of Scripture, which he argued went back to the time of the apostles themselves. Scripture could not be allowed to be interpreted in any arbitrary or random way: it had to be interpreted within the context of the historical continuity of the Christian church. The parameters of its interpretation were historically fixed and given. “Tradition” here means simply “a traditional way of interpreting Scripture within the community of faith.” This is what is known as a single-source theory of tradition.

Irenaeus of Lyons (c.130–c.200). Probably a native of Asia Minor, who was elected bishop of the southern French city of Lyons around 178. He is chiefly noted for his major writing *Adversus haereses* (“Against the heresies”), which defended the Christian faith against Gnostic misrepresentations and criticisms.

To understand Irenaeus at this point, we shall examine a passage from his major work *Against Heresies*, in which he engages with the Gnostic threat through an appeal to tradition. Irenaeus here argues that the living Christian community possessed a tradition of interpreting Scripture which was denied to heretics. By their historical succession from the apostles, the bishops ensure that their congregations remain faithful to their teachings and interpretations:

Everyone who wishes to perceive the truth should consider the apostolic tradition, which has been made known in every church in the entire world. We are able to number those who are bishops appointed by the apostles, and their successors in the churches to the present day, who taught and knew nothing of such things as these people imagine. For if

the apostles had known secret mysteries which they taught privately and secretly to the perfect, they would have passed them down to those to whom they entrusted the churches. ... Therefore, as there are so many demonstrations of this fact, there is no need to look anywhere else for the truth which we can easily obtain from the church. The apostles have, as it were, deposited this truth in all its fullness in this depository, so that whoever wants to may draw from this water of life. This is the gate of life; all others are thieves and robbers.

The Gnostics had argued that they had access to a secret oral tradition which allowed them to discern the true meaning of passages in the Bible. Irenaeus contrasts this with the publicly accessible Christian tradition, which is “made known in every church in the entire world.” Irenaeus argues that the teachings of the apostles, which secure salvation for those who accept them, are made known through the public teaching of the church. The apostolic teaching “in all its fullness” has been “deposited” – that is, made available and accessible – through the church.

Note how Irenaeus points out a problem with the Gnostic position. If the Gnostics are dependent on a “secret tradition,” deriving from the apostles, how can they be sure that it has been passed down correctly? To whom was it entrusted? And who did these people pass it on to subsequently? Irenaeus stresses that, in the case of the Christian church, the immediate and subsequent successors to the apostles are known and can be named. Irenaeus sees the bishops as visible embodiments of the institutional and doctrinal continuity between the apostles and the contemporary church. The apostles chose to entrust their teaching to named successors within the church.

Irenaeus ends by using a text from the Gospel of John to make his point. “Jesus said again, ‘I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers’” (John 10: 7–8). What is the point that Irenaeus is making here? How does this imagery help him to clinch his point?

Tertullian (c.160–c.225). A major figure in early Latin theology, who produced a series of significant controversial and apologetic writings. He is particularly noted for his ability to coin new Latin terms to translate the emerging theological vocabulary of the Greek-speaking eastern church.

A similar point is made by the Roman theologian Tertullian, in an early third-century analysis of the sources of theology dedicated to demonstrating

the weaknesses of the heretical positions. Tertullian here lays considerable emphasis upon the role of tradition and apostolic succession in the defining of Christian theology. Orthodoxy depends upon remaining historically continuous with and theologically dependent upon the apostles. The heretics, in contrast, cannot demonstrate any such continuity:

If the Lord Jesus Christ sent out the apostles to preach, no preachers other than those which are appointed by Christ are to be received, since “no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son has revealed him,” and the Son appears to have revealed him to no one except the apostles who he sent to preach what he had revealed to them. What they preached – that is, what Christ revealed to them – ought, by this ruling, to be established only by those churches which those apostles founded by their preaching and, as they say, by the living voice, and subsequently through their letters. If this is true, all doctrine which is in agreement with those apostolic churches, the sources and originals of the faith, must be accounted as the truth, since it indubitably preserves what the churches received from the apostles, the apostles from Christ, and Christ from God.

Tertullian’s argument lays considerable emphasis on the importance of historical continuity. Note how he stresses the importance of the link between apostles and bishops, and especially the way in which he demands that those who claim to represent “apostolic” teaching must be able to verify their historical links with the apostles.

The debate over authentic Christian teaching continued well into the fifth century. One major concern focused on the idea of doctrinal innovation. What was the church to make of teachings which claimed to be based on Scripture, but which seemed to represent new teachings? The controversies within the early church often seemed to end up introducing new teachings, rather than simply defending older teachings.

Vincent of Lérins (died before 450). A French theologian who settled on the island of Lérins. He is particularly noted for his emphasis on the role of tradition in guarding against innovations in the doctrine of the church, and is credited with the formulation of the so-called “Vincentian canon.”

A major contribution to this question was made in 434 by Vincent of Lérins, based in the south of France, and sometimes known by the pseudonym “Peregrinus.” Writing in the aftermath of the Pelagian

controversy, Vincent of Lérins expressed his belief that the controversies of that time had given rise to theological innovations, such as new ways of interpreting certain biblical passages. It is clear that he regarded Augustine's doctrine of double predestination (which arose as a response to Pelagius's views on grace) as a case in point. But how could such doctrinal innovations be identified? In response to this question, he argues for a triple criterion by which authentic Christian teaching may be established: ecumenicity (being believed everywhere), antiquity (being believed always), and consent (being believed by all people). This triple criterion is often described as the "Vincentian canon," the word "canon" here having the sense of "rule" or "norm."

Holy Scripture, on account of its depth, is not accepted in a universal sense. The same statements are interpreted in one way by one person, in another by someone else, with the result that there seem to be as many opinions as there are people. ... Therefore, on account of the number and variety of errors, there is a need for someone to lay down a rule for the interpretation of the prophets and the apostles in such a way that is directed by the rule of the Catholic church. Now in the Catholic church itself the greatest care is taken that we hold that which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all people [*quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*].

The problem that Vincent hopes to resolve is this: how are authentically Christian teachings to be distinguished from those of heretics? An initial answer to this question might seem to be that these teachings can be identified on account of their faithfulness to Scripture. However, Vincent makes the point that Scripture is interpreted in different ways by different people. A simple appeal to the Bible is therefore not good enough; something additional is needed, to allow the church to determine which of the possible interpretations of a biblical passage is to be preferred. For this reason, Vincent argues for the need for a "rule for the interpretation of the prophets and the apostles." He finds this "rule" in what has since come to be known as the *consensus fidelium*, "the consensus of the faithful," which has, according to Vincent, three elements. A belief or way of interpreting Scripture must have been accepted "everywhere, always, and by all people." In other words, it must not be limited to a certain geographical region, a specific period of time, or a small group of people.

Vincent's definition proved highly influential, and is often reflected in later writings dealing with this theme. By the end of the patristic period, the idea of interpreting the Bible within the living tradition of the Christian church was seen as an essential antidote to heresy, and had become part of the accepted way of doing theology.

Case study 1.2 The Arian controversy: The divinity of Christ

The patristic period saw considerable attention being paid to the doctrine of the person of Christ. The debate was conducted primarily within the eastern church; interestingly, Augustine of Hippo never wrote anything of consequence on Christology. The period proved to be definitive, laying down guidelines for the discussion of the person of Christ which remained normative until the dawn of the Enlightenment debates on the relation of faith and history, to be considered in a later case study (see case study 4.1).

The task confronting the patristic writers was basically the development of a unified Christological scheme, which would bring together and integrate the various Christological hints and statements, images and models, found within the New Testament – some of which have been considered briefly above. That task proved complex. The first period of the development of Christology centered on the question of the divinity of Christ, and may be regarded as focusing on the question of whether Jesus Christ may legitimately be described as “God.” That Jesus Christ was human appeared to be something of a truism to most early patristic writers. It was self-evidently true, and did not require justification. What required explanation about Christ concerned the manner in which he differed from, rather than approximated to, other human beings.

Two early viewpoints were quickly rejected as heretical. Ebionitism, a primarily Jewish sect which flourished in the early first centuries of the Christian era, regarded Jesus as an ordinary human being, the human son of Mary and Joseph. This reduced Christology was regarded as totally inadequate by its opponents, and soon passed into oblivion. More significant was the diametrically opposed view, which came to be known as Docetism, from the Greek verb *dokein* (to seem or appear). This approach – which is probably best regarded as a tendency within theology rather than a definite theological position – argued that Christ was totally divine, and that his humanity was merely an appearance. The sufferings of Christ are thus treated as apparent rather than real. Docetism held a particular attraction for the Gnostic writers of the second century, during which period it reached its

zenith. By this time, however, other viewpoints were in the process of emerging, which would eventually eclipse this tendency.

Justin Martyr represents one such viewpoint. Justin Martyr, amongst the most important of the second-century Apologists, was especially concerned to demonstrate that the Christian faith brought to fruition the insights of both classical Greek philosophy and Judaism. Adolf von Harnack summarized the manner in which Justin achieved this objective: he argued that “Christ is the *Logos* and *Nomos*” (*nomos* is the Greek term for “Law,” here referring to the Torah). Of particular interest is the Logos-Christology that Justin develops, in which he exploits the apologetic potential of the idea of the “Logos,” current in both Stoicism and the Middle Platonism of the period. The Logos (*logos* is a Greek term usually translated as “word” – e.g., as it is found at John 1: 14) is to be thought of as the ultimate source of all human knowledge. The one and the same Logos is known by both Christian believers and pagan philosophers; the latter, however, only have partial access to it, whereas Christians have full access to it, on account of its manifestation in Christ. Justin allows that pre-Christian secular philosophers, such as Heraclitus or Socrates, thus had partial access to the truth, on account of the manner in which the Logos is present in the world.

Justin Martyr (c.100–c.165). One of the most noted of the Christian apologists of the second century, with a concern to demonstrate the moral and intellectual credibility of Christianity in a pagan world. His First Apology stresses the manner in which Christianity brings to fulfillment the insights of classical philosophy.

An idea of especial importance in this context is that of the *logos spermatikos*, which appears to derive from Middle Platonism. The divine Logos sowed seeds throughout human history; it is therefore to be expected that this “seed-bearing Logos” will be known, even if only in part, by non-Christians. Justin is therefore able to argue that Christianity builds upon and fulfills the hints and anticipations of God’s revelation which is to be had through pagan philosophy. The Logos was known temporarily through the theophanies (that is, appearances or manifestations of God) in the Old Testament; Christ brings the Logos to its fullest revelation. The world of Greek philosophy is thus set firmly in the context of Christianity: it is a prelude to the coming of Christ, who brings to fulfillment what it had hitherto known only in part.

It is in the writings of Origen that the Logos-Christology appears to find its fullest development. In the Incarnation, the human soul of Christ is

united with the Logos. On account of the closeness of this union, Christ's human soul comes to share in the properties of the Logos. Nevertheless, Origen insists that, although both the Logos and Father are coeternal, the Logos is subordinate to the Father.

We noted above that Justin Martyr argued that the Logos was accessible to all, even if only in a fragmentary manner. Its full disclosure only came in Christ. Related ideas can be found in other writers to adopt the Logos-Christology, including Origen. Origen adopts an illuminationist approach to revelation, in which God's act of revelation is compared to being enlightened by the "rays of God," which are caused by "the light which is the divine Logos." For Origen, both truth and salvation are to be had outside the Christian faith.

Origen (c.185–c.254). Leading representative of the Alexandrian school of theology, especially noted for his allegorical exposition of Scripture, and his use of Platonic ideas in theology, particularly Christology. The originals of many of his works, which were written in Greek, have been lost, with the result that some are known only in Latin translations of questionable reliability.

What has been said thus far is intended to be an introduction to one of the most important landmark theological debates of the patristic period – the Arian controversy of the fourth century. The Arian controversy remains a landmark in the development of classical Christology, and therefore demands extensive discussion. It must be noted that certain aspects of the history of the controversy remain obscure, and are likely to remain so, despite the best efforts of historians to clarify them. What concerns us here are the theological aspects of the debate, which are comparatively well understood. However, it must be stressed that we know Arius's views mainly in the form in which they have been mediated to us by his opponents, which raises questions about the potential bias of their presentations. What follows is an attempt to present Arius's distinctive Christological ideas as fairly as possible, on the basis of the relatively few reliable sources now available to us.

Arius emphasizes the self-subsistence of God. God is the one and only source of all created things; nothing exists which does not ultimately derive from God. This view of God, which many commentators have suggested is due more to Hellenistic philosophy than to Christian theology, clearly raises the question of the relation of the Father to the Son. In his *Against the*

Arians, Arius's critic Athanasius represents him as making the following statements on this point:

God was not always a father. There was a time when God was all alone, and was not yet a father; only later did he become a father. The Son did not always exist. Everything created is out of nothing ... so the Logos of God came into existence out of nothing. There was a time when he was not. Before he was brought into being, he did not exist. He also had a beginning to his created existence.

Arius (c.250–c.336). The originator of Arianism, a form of Christology which refused to concede the full divinity of Christ. Little is known of his life, and little has survived of his writings. With the exception of a letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia, his views are known mainly through the writings of his opponents.

These statements are of considerable importance, and bring us to the heart of Arianism. The following points are of especial significance:

1. The Father is regarded as existing before the Son. "There was when he was not." This decisive affirmation places Father and Son on different levels, and is consistent with Arius's rigorous insistence that the Son is a creature. Only the Father is "unbegotten"; the Son, like all other creatures, derives from this one source of being. However, Arius is careful to emphasize that the Son is like every other creature. There is a distinction of rank between the Son and other creatures, including human beings. Arius has some difficulty in identifying the precise nature of this distinction. The Son, he argues, is "a perfect creature, yet not as one among other creatures; a begotten being, yet not as one among other begotten beings." The implication seems to be that the Son outranks other creatures, while sharing their essentially created and begotten nature.
2. Arius stresses the unknowability of God to creatures, with the result that the Father must be unknown to the Son (who is, as we have noted, a creature). Arius emphasizes the utter transcendence and inaccessibility of God. God cannot be known by any other creature. Yet, as we noted above, the Son is to be regarded as a creature, however elevated above all other creatures. Arius presses home his logic, arguing that the Son cannot know the Father. "The one who has a beginning is in no position to comprehend or lay hold of the one who has no beginning." This important affirmation rests upon the radical

distinction between Father and Son. Such is the gulf fixed between them that the latter cannot know the former unaided. In common with all other creatures, the Son is dependent upon the grace of God if the Son is to perform whatever function has been ascribed to him. It is considerations such as these which have led Arius's critics to argue that, at the levels of revelation and salvation, the Son is in precisely the same position as other creatures.

3. Arius argued that the biblical passages which seemed to speak of Christ's status in terms of divinity were merely using language in an honorific manner. (The technical term for this way of using language is "catachrestic.") Arius's opponents were easily able to bring forward a series of biblical passages pointing to the fundamental unity between Father and Son. On the basis of the controversial literature of the period, it is clear that the Fourth Gospel was of major importance to this controversy, with John 3: 35, 10: 30, 12: 27, 14: 10, 17: 3, and 17: 11 being discussed frequently. Arius's response to such texts is significant: the language of "sonship" is variegated in character, and metaphorical in nature. To refer to the "Son" is an honorific, rather than theologically precise, way of speaking. Although Jesus Christ is referred to as "Son" in Scripture, this metaphorical (more accurately, catachrestic) way of speaking is subject to the controlling principle of a God who is totally different in essence from all created beings – including the Son.

Arius's position can therefore be summarized as follows:

1. The Son is a creature, who, like all other creatures, derives from the will of God.
2. The term "Son" is thus a metaphor, an honorific term intended to underscore the rank of the Son among *other creatures*. *It does not imply that Father and Son share the same being or status.*
3. The status of the Son is itself a consequence of the will of the Father; it is not a consequence of the nature of the Son, but of the will of the Father.

Athanasius had little time for Arius's subtle distinctions. If the Son is a creature, then the Son is a creature like any other creature, including human beings. After all, what other kind of creaturehood is there? For Athanasius, the affirmation of the creaturehood of the Son had two decisive

consequences, each of which had uniformly negative implications for Arianism.

First, Athanasius makes the point that it is only God who can save. God, and God alone, can break the power of sin, and bring us to eternal life. An essential feature of being a creature is that one requires to be redeemed. No creature can save another creature. Only the creator can redeem the creation. Having emphasized that it is God alone who can save, Athanasius then makes the logical move which the Arians found difficult to counter. The New Testament and the Christian liturgical tradition alike regard Jesus Christ as Savior. Yet, as Athanasius emphasized, only God can save. So how are we to make sense of this?

Athanasius (c.296–373). One of the most significant defenders of orthodox Christology during the period of the Arian controversy. Elected as bishop of Alexandria in 328, he was deposed on account of his opposition to Arianism. Although he was widely supported in the west, his views were only finally recognized at the Council of Constantinople (381) after his death.

The only possible solution, Athanasius argues, is to accept that Jesus is God incarnate. The logic of his argument at times goes something like this:

1. No creature can redeem another creature.
2. According to Arius, Jesus Christ is a creature.
3. Therefore, according to Arius, Jesus Christ cannot redeem humanity.

At times, a slightly different style of argument can be discerned, resting upon the statements of Scripture and the Christian liturgical tradition:

1. Only God can save.
2. Jesus Christ saves.
3. Therefore Jesus Christ is God.

Salvation, for Athanasius, involves divine intervention. Athanasius thus draws out the meaning of John 1: 14 by arguing that the “word became flesh”: in other words, God entered into our human situation, in order to change it.

The second point that Athanasius makes is that Christians worship and pray to Jesus Christ. This represents an excellent case study of the importance of Christian practices of worship and prayer for Christian theology. By the fourth century, prayer to and adoration of Christ were standard features of the way in which public worship took place. Athanasius argues that if Jesus Christ is a creature, then Christians are guilty of

worshiping a creature instead of God – in other words, they had lapsed into idolatry. Christians, Athanasius stresses, are totally forbidden to worship anyone or anything except God himself. Athanasius thus argued that Arius seemed to be guilty of making nonsense of the way in which Christians prayed and worshiped. Athanasius argued that Christians were right to worship and adore Jesus Christ because, by doing so, they were recognizing him for what he was – God incarnate.

The Arian controversy had to be settled somehow, if peace was to be established within the church. Debate came to center upon two terms as possible descriptions of the relation of the Father to the Son. The term *homoiousios*, “of like substance” or “of like being,” was seen by many as representing a judicious compromise, allowing the proximity between Father and Son to be asserted without requiring any further speculation on the precise nature of their relation. However, the rival term *homoousios*, “of the same substance” or “of the same being,” eventually gained the upper hand. Though differing by only one letter from the alternative term, it embodied a very different understanding of the relationship between Father and Son. The fury of the debate prompted the British historian Edward Gibbon to comment in his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* that never had there been so much energy spent over a single vowel. The Nicene Creed – or, more accurately, the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed – of 381 declared that Christ was “of the same substance” with the Father. This affirmation has since widely become regarded as a benchmark of Christological orthodoxy within all the mainstream Christian churches, whether Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox.

The present case study has explored a controversy that arose concerning the issue of Christology. The following case study explores a debate which arose specifically within the Alexandrian Christological school, centering on the teachings of Apollinaris of Laodicea.

Case study 1.3 The Alexandrian Christological school: The Apollinarian controversy

In an earlier case study (case study 1.2), we considered Athanasius's response to Arius. In doing so, we began to touch on some of the features of the Alexandrian school of Christology. It is therefore appropriate to explore these in more detail, and look at one debate which illustrated the tensions within the school. In a later case study (case study 1.4), we shall explore the views of the rival Antiochene school.

The outlook of the Alexandrian school, of which Athanasius is a representative, is strongly soteriological in character. Jesus Christ is the redeemer of humanity, where "redemption" means "being taken up into the life of God" or "being made divine," a notion traditionally expressed in terms of deification. Christology gives expression to what this soteriological insight implies. We could summarize the trajectory of Alexandrian Christology along the following lines: if human nature is to be deified, it must be united with the divine nature. God must become united with human nature in such a manner that the latter is enabled to share in the life of God. This, the Alexandrians argued, was precisely what happened in and through the incarnation of the Son of God in Jesus Christ. The Second Person of the Trinity assumed human nature, and, by doing so, ensured its divinization. God became human in order that humanity might become divine.

Alexandrian writers thus placed considerable emphasis upon the idea of the Logos assuming human nature. The term "assuming" is important; a distinction is drawn between the Logos "dwelling within humanity" (as in the case of the Old Testament prophets), and the Logos taking human nature upon itself (as in the incarnation of the Son of God). Particular emphasis came to be placed upon John 1: 14 ("the word became flesh"), which came to embody the fundamental insights of the school and the liturgical celebration of Christmas. To celebrate the birth of Christ was to celebrate the coming of the Logos to the world, and its taking human nature upon itself in order to redeem it.

This clearly raised the question of the relation of the divinity and humanity of Christ. Cyril of Alexandria is one of many writers within the school to emphasize the reality of their union in the Incarnation. The Logos existed “without flesh” before its union with human nature; after that union, there is only one nature, in that the Logos united human nature to itself. This emphasis upon the one nature of Christ distinguishes the Alexandrian from the Antiochene school, which was more receptive to the idea of two natures within Christ. Cyril, writing in the fifth century, states this point as follows:

We do not affirm that the nature of the Logos underwent a change and became flesh, or that it was transformed into a whole or perfect human consisting of flesh and body; rather, we say that the Logos ... personally united itself to human nature with a living soul, became a human being, and was called the Son of Man, but not of mere will or favour.

Cyril of Alexandria (d.444). A significant writer, who was appointed patriarch of Alexandria in 412. He became involved in the controversy over the Christological views of Nestorius, and produced major statements and defenses of the orthodox position on the two natures of Christ.

This raised the question of what kind of human nature had been assumed. We may return to the fourth century to explore this point further. Apollinaris of Laodicea had anxieties about the increasingly widespread belief that the Logos assumed human nature in its entirety. It seemed to him that this implied that the Logos was contaminated by the weaknesses of human nature. How could the Son of God be allowed to be tainted by purely human directive principles? The sinlessness of Christ would be compromised, in Apollinaris’s view, if he were to possess a purely human mind; was not the human mind the source of sin and rebellion against God? Only if the human mind were to be replaced by a purely divine motivating and directing force could the sinlessness of Christ be maintained. For this reason, Apollinaris argued that, in Christ, a purely human mind and soul were replaced by a divine mind and soul: “the divine energy fulfills the role of the animating soul and of the human mind” in Christ. The human nature of Christ is thus incomplete.

This can be seen clearly from a letter written by Apollinaris to the bishops at Diocaesarea, which sets out the leading features of his Christology. The

most important is the unequivocal assertion that the Word did not assume a “changeable” human mind in the Incarnation, which would have led to the Word being trapped in human sin. Rather, it assumed “an immutable and heavenly divine mind.” As a result, Christ cannot be said to be totally human.

We confess that the Word of God has not descended upon a holy man, which was what happened in the case of the prophets. Rather, the Word himself has become flesh without having assumed a human mind – that is, a changeable mind, which is enslaved to filthy thoughts – but which exists as an immutable and heavenly divine mind.

Apollinaris of Laodicea (c.310–c.390). A vigorous defender of orthodoxy against the Arian heresy, who was appointed bishop of Laodicea at some point around 360. He is chiefly remembered for his Christological views, which were regarded as an overreaction to Arianism, and widely criticized at the Council of Constantinople (381).

This idea appalled many of Apollinaris’s colleagues. The Apollinarian view of Christ may have had its attractions for some; others, however, were shocked by its soteriological implications. It was pointed out above (p. 46) that soteriological considerations are of central importance to the Alexandrian approach. How could human nature be redeemed, it was asked, if only part of human nature had been assumed by the Logos? Perhaps the most famous statement of this position is set out by Gregory of Nazianzus in his Letter 101, in which he stressed the redemptive importance of the assumption of human nature in its totality at the Incarnation.

Gregory of Nazianzus (329–89), also known as “Gregory Nazianzen.” He is particularly remembered for his “Five Theological Orations,” written around 380, and a compilation of extracts from the writings of Origen, which he entitled the *Philokalia*.

In this letter, written in Greek at some point in 380 or 381, Gregory mounts a frontal assault on the central thesis of Apollinarianism: that Christ was not fully human, in that he possessed “an immutable and heavenly divine mind,” rather than a human mind. For Gregory, this amounts to a denial of the possibility of redemption. Only what is assumed by the Word in the Incarnation can be redeemed. If Christ did not possess a human mind, humanity is not redeemed.

We do not separate the humanity from the divinity; in fact, we assert the dogma of the unity and identity of the Person, who previously was not just human but God, the only Son before all ages, who in these last days

has assumed human nature also for our salvation ... If anyone has put their trust in him as a human being lacking a human mind, they are themselves mindless and not worthy of salvation. For what has not been assumed has not been healed; it is what is united to his divinity that is saved. ... Let them not grudge us our total salvation, or endue the Saviour with only the bones and nerves and mere appearance of humanity.

Gregory here stresses that Jesus Christ is both perfect God and a perfect human person. Even though human nature has fallen, through the impact of sin, it remains capable of being redeemed. And if the whole of human nature is to be redeemed, it follows that the whole of that human nature must be assumed. Gregory thus affirms the use of the term “Theotokos” to refer to Mary. For Gregory, the use of this title (which can be translated literally as “bearer of God,” but is often translated in a more popular form as “Mother of God”) is a necessary consequence of the Incarnation. To deny this title is to deny the reality of the Incarnation – a point which is of especial importance in relation to the controversy which broke out within the Antiochene school over the teaching of Nestorius on this matter, which we shall consider in a later case study.

The central theme of the passage can be summed up in the assertion: “what has not been assumed has not been healed.” For Gregory, only those aspects of human nature which have been united to the divinity in the Incarnation are saved. If we are to be saved in the totality of our human nature, that totality must be brought into contact with the divinity. If Christ is only partly or apparently human, then salvation is not possible.

In the present case study, we have explored a major controversy within one of the two dominant patristic schools of Christology. In the following case study, we shall examine a highly significant debate which broke out within the Antiochene school.

Case study 1.4 The Antiochene Christological school: The Nestorian controversy

In an earlier case study (case study 1.3), we noted the development of the Alexandrian school of Christology, and traced the trajectory of a major controversy within it. In the present case study, we shall repeat this exercise, focusing on the rival school of Antioch.

The school of Christology which arose in ancient Syria (modern-day Turkey) differed considerably from its Egyptian rival at Alexandria. One of the most significant points of difference concerns the context in which Christological speculation was set. The Alexandrian writers were motivated primarily by soteriological considerations. Concerned that deficient understandings of the person of Christ were linked with inadequate conceptions of salvation, they used ideas derived from secular Greek philosophy to ensure a picture of Christ which was consistent with the full redemption of humanity. The idea of the “Logos” was of particular importance here, especially when linked with the notion of incarnation.

The Antiochene writers differed at this point. Their concerns were moral, rather than purely soteriological, and they drew much less significantly on the ideas of Greek philosophy. The basic trajectory of much Antiochene thinking on the identity of Christ can be traced along the following lines. On account of their disobedience, human beings exist in a state of corruption, from which they are unable to extricate themselves. If redemption is to take place, it must be on the basis of a new obedience on the part of humanity. In that humanity is unable to break free from the bonds of sin, God is obliged to intervene. This leads to the coming of the redeemer as one who unites humanity and divinity, and thus to the reestablishment of an obedient people of God.

The two natures of Christ are vigorously defended. Christ is at one and the same time both God and a human being. Against the Alexandrian criticism that this was to deny the unity of Christ, the Antiochenes responded that they upheld that unity, while simultaneously recognizing that the one redeemer possessed both a perfect human and perfect divine nature.

There is a “perfect conjunction” between the human and divine natures in Christ. The complete unity of Christ is thus not inconsistent with his possessing two natures, divine and human. Theodore of Mopsuestia stressed this, in asserting that the glory of Jesus Christ “comes from God the Logos, who assumed him and united him to himself. ... And because of this exact conjunction which this human being has with God the Son, the whole creation honors and worships him.”

So how did the Antiochene theologians envisage the mode of union of divine and human natures in Christ? We have already seen the “assumption” model which had gained the ascendancy at Alexandria, by which the Logos assumed human flesh. What model was employed at Antioch? The answer could be summarized as follows:

Alexandria: Logos assumes a general human nature.

Antioch: Logos assumes a specific human being.

Theodore of Mopsuestia often implies that the Logos did not assume “human nature” in general, but a specific human being. Instead of assuming a general or abstract human nature, Theodore appears to suggest that the Logos assumed a specific concrete human individual. This seems to be the case in his work *On the Incarnation*: “In coming to indwell, the Logos united the assumed (human being) as a whole to itself, and made him to share with it in all the dignity which the one who indwells, being the Son of God by nature, possesses.”

So how are the human and divine natures related? Antiochene writers were convinced that the Alexandrian position led to the “mingling” or “confusion” of the divine and human natures of Christ. Instead, they devised a manner of conceptualizing the relationship between the two natures which maintained their distinct identities. This “union according to good pleasure” involves the human and divine natures of Christ being understood to be rather like watertight compartments within Christ. They never interact, or mingle with one another. They remain distinct, being held together by the good pleasure of God. The “hypostatic union” – that is, the union of the divine and human natures in Christ – rests in the will of God.

This might seem to suggest that Theodore of Mopsuestia regards the union of the divine and human natures as being a purely moral union, like that of a husband and wife. It also leads to a suspicion that the Logos merely puts on human nature, as one would put on a coat: the action

involved is temporary and reversible, and involves no fundamental change to anyone involved. However, the Antiochene writers do not seem to have intended these conclusions to be drawn. Perhaps the most reliable way of approaching their position is to suggest that their desire to avoid confusing the divine and human natures within Christ led them to stress their distinctiveness – yet in so doing, to inadvertently weaken their link in the hypostatic union.

This became a matter of controversy on account of the way in which Nestorius chose to express his Christological views, which seemed to his critics to amount to a doctrine of “two sons” – that is, that Jesus Christ was not a single person, but two, one human and one divine. Yet this is explicitly excluded by the leading writers of the school, such as Nestorius. Christ is, according to Nestorius, “the common name of the two natures”:

Christ is indivisible in that he is Christ, but he is twofold in that he is both God and a human being. He is one in his sonship, but is twofold in that which takes and that which is taken. ... For we do not acknowledge two Christs or two sons or “only-begottens” or Lords; not one son and another son, not a first “only-begotten” and a new “only-begotten,” not a first and second Christ, but one and the same.

Nestorius (died c.451). A major representative of the Antiochene school of theology, who became patriarch of Constantinople in 428. His vigorous emphasis upon the humanity of Christ seemed to his critics to amount to a denial of his divinity. Nestorius’s failure to endorse the term *Theotokos* led to him being openly charged with heresy. Although far more orthodox than his opponents allowed, the extent of Nestorius’s orthodoxy remains unclear and disputed.

Nestorius’s views created something of a scandal, as contemporary reports indicate. What follows is an extract from a history of the church compiled around this time by Socrates, also known as “Scholasticus.” While there is probably a degree of bias in the reporting of Nestorius’s actions and words, what is found in this passage corresponds well with what is known of the situation at this time. Notice how the controversy focuses on whether Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, may properly be referred to as *Theotokos* (“God-bearer”). Nestorius is here depicted as confused about whether to use the term or not, hesitant as to what its use affirms, yet fearful as to what its denial might imply:

[Nestorius] adopted a controversial attitude, and totally rejected the term *Theotokos*. The controversy on the matter was taken one way by

some and another way by others, with the result that the ensuing discussion divided the church, and began to look like people fighting in the dark, with everyone coming out with the most confused and contradictory assertions. Nestorius acquired the popular reputation of asserting that the Lord was nothing more than a human being, and attempting to impose the teaching of Paul of Samosata and Photinus on the church. This led to such a great outcry that it was thought necessary to convene a general council to rule on the matter in dispute.

To understand the point at issue here, we need to explore an aspect of Christology known as the doctrine of the “communication of attributes,” a notion often discussed in terms of the Latin phrase *communicatio idiomatum*. The issue involved can be explored as follows. By the end of the fourth century, the following propositions had gained widespread acceptance within the church:

1. Jesus is fully human.
2. Jesus is fully divine.

If both these statements are simultaneously true, it was argued, then what was true of the humanity of Jesus must also be true of his divinity – and vice versa. An example might be the following:

Jesus Christ is God;

Mary gave birth to Jesus;

Therefore Mary is the Mother of God.

This kind of argument became increasingly commonplace within the late fourth-century church; indeed, it often served as a means of testing the orthodoxy of a theologian. A failure to agree that Mary was the “Mother of God” became seen as tantamount to a refusal to accept the divinity of Christ. This can be seen, for example, in Gregory of Nyssa’s response to Apollinaris, noted in case study 1.3.

But how far can this principle be pressed? For example, consider the following line of argument:

Jesus suffered on the cross;

Jesus is God;

Therefore God suffered on the cross.

The first two statements are orthodox, and commanded widespread assent within the church. But the conclusion drawn from them was widely regarded as unacceptable. It was axiomatic to most patristic writers that

God could not suffer. The patristic period witnessed theologians agonizing over the limits that could be set to this approach. Thus Gregory of Nazianzus insisted that God must be considered to suffer; otherwise the reality of the incarnation of the Son of God was called into question. However, it was the Nestorian controversy which highlighted the importance of the issues.

By the time of Nestorius, the title *Theotokos* had become widely accepted within both popular piety and academic theology. Nestorius was, however, alarmed at some of its implications. It seemed to deny the humanity of Christ. Why not call Mary *anthropotokos* (“bearer of humanity”) or even *Christotokos* (“bearer of the Christ”)? His suggestions were met with outrage and indignation, on account of the enormous theological investment that had come to be associated with the term *Theotokos*. Nestorius may be regarded as making an entirely legitimate point; however, the manner in which he made it caused considerable offense.

The controversy was unquestionably heightened by a simmering political controversy over the status of the patriarchate of Constantinople. Those hostile to its growing status within the Christian world (especially those linked with the rival city of Alexandria) seized on Nestorius’s comments, and exploited their potentially controversial nature to challenge the status of the patriarchate. This kind of hostility can be seen in the response of Cyril of Alexandria to Nestorius, to which we now turn.

In an important section of his Letter 17, written around 430, Cyril condemns 12 propositions associated with the Antiochene school of Christology. Although Cyril regards these views as heretical, there are points at which it seems that his primary concern is to establish the supremacy of the Alexandrian over the Antiochene position. The first three statements are particularly significant:

1. If any one does not acknowledge that Emmanuel is truly God, and that the holy Virgin is, in consequence, “Theotokos,” for she gave birth in the flesh to the Word of God who has become flesh, let them be condemned.
2. If any one does not acknowledge that the Word of God the Father was substantially united with flesh, and with his own flesh is one Christ, that is, one and the same God and human being together, let them be condemned.

3. If any one divides the persons in the one Christ after their union, joining them together in a mere conjunction in accordance with their rank, or a conjunction effected by authority or power, instead of a combination according to a union of natures, let them be condemned.

The following points are of especial interest.

1. The first point focuses on the use of the term *Theotokos*, in effect making a willingness to use this term as a litmus test for orthodoxy in relation to the doctrine of the Incarnation. For Cyril, anyone who refuses to use this term is, in effect, denying the reality of the divinity of Christ, and is therefore heretical.

2. The second point insists upon a physical union of some kind between humanity and divinity in Christ. Cyril is here critiquing the Antiochene model of incarnation, in which the humanity and divinity were understood to be fully present in Christ, yet in a non-interactive mode. For Cyril, only the model of “assumption,” in which the divine nature “assumes” the human, can do justice to the orthodox teaching.

3. Cyril therefore condemns, in his third point, the idea of a “union according to good pleasure,” which was characteristic of the Antiochene school. Dismissing this as a mere “conjunction” rather than a genuine union, Cyril argues that this is totally ineffective in safeguarding the vital theological and spiritual principles at stake in the doctrine of the Incarnation.

It will be clear that Christology was an issue of major importance during the patristic period. As a result of the debates of the period, the contours of the Christian consensus on the matter began to emerge and to advance the agenda of theological debate. It is widely agreed that, once the Christological issue had been settled, the next issue to be debated was the distinctive Christian doctrine of God. This naturally brings us to the doctrine of the Trinity, which is the subject of the following case study.

Case study 1.5 The Trinity: Early developments and controversies

The development of the doctrine of the Trinity is best seen as organically related to the evolution of Christology. It became increasingly clear that there was a consensus to the effect that Jesus was “of the same substance” (*homoousios*) as God, rather than just “of similar substance” (*homoiousios*). But if Jesus was God, in any meaningful sense of the word, what did this imply about God? If Jesus was God, were there now two Gods? Or was a radical reconsideration of the nature of God appropriate? Historically, it is possible to argue that the doctrine of the Trinity is closely linked with the development of the doctrine of the divinity of Christ. The more emphatic the church became that Christ was God, the more it came under pressure to clarify how Christ related to God.

The starting point for Christian reflections on the Trinity is the New Testament witness to the presence and activity of God in Christ and through the Spirit. For Irenaeus, the whole process of salvation, from its beginning to its end, bore witness to the action of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Irenaeus made use of a term which featured prominently in future discussion of the Trinity: “the economy of salvation.” That word “economy” needs clarification. The Greek word *oikonomia* basically means “the way in which one’s affairs are ordered” (the relation to the modern sense of the word will thus be clear). For Irenaeus, the term “economy of salvation” means “the way in which God has ordered the salvation of humanity in history.”

At the time, Irenaeus was under considerable pressure from Gnostic critics, who argued that the creator god was quite distinct from (and inferior to) the redeemer god. In the form favored by Marcion, this idea took the following form: the Old Testament god is a creator god, and totally different from the redeemer god of the New Testament. As a result, the Old Testament should be shunned by Christians, who should concentrate their attention upon the New Testament. Irenaeus vigorously rejected this idea. He insisted that the entire process of salvation, from the first moment of creation to the last moment of history, was the work of one and the same

God. There was a single economy of salvation, in which the one God – who was both creator and redeemer – was at work to redeem his creation.

In his *Demonstration of the Preaching of the Apostles*, Irenaeus insisted upon the distinct yet related roles of Father, Son, and Spirit within the economy of salvation. He affirmed his faith in:

God the Father uncreated, who is uncontained, invisible one God, creator of the universe ... and the Word of God, the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who ... in the fulness of time, to gather all things to himself, became a human among humans, to ... destroy death, bring life, and achieve fellowship between God and humanity. ... And the Holy Spirit ... was poured out in a new way on our humanity to make us new throughout the world in the sight of God.

This passage sets out a clear statement of the idea of an “economic Trinity” – that is to say, an understanding of the nature of the Godhead in which each person is responsible for an aspect of the economy of salvation. Far from being a rather pointless piece of theological speculation, the doctrine of the Trinity is grounded directly in the complex human experience of redemption in Christ, and is concerned with the explanation of this experience.

Tertullian gave the theology of the Trinity its distinctive vocabulary; he also shaped its distinctive form. God is one; nevertheless, God cannot be regarded as something or someone who is totally isolated from the created order. The economy of salvation demonstrates that God is active in his creation. This activity is complex; on analysis, this divine action reveals both a unity and a distinctiveness. Tertullian argues that substance is what unites the three aspects of the economy of salvation; person is what distinguishes them. The three persons of the Trinity are distinct, yet not divided, different yet not separate or independent of each other. The complexity of the human experience of redemption is thus the result of the three persons of the Godhead acting in distinct yet coordinated manners in human history, without any loss of the total unity of the Godhead.

By the second half of the fourth century, the debate concerning the relation of the Father and Son gave every indication of having been settled. The recognition that Father and Son were “of one being” settled the Arian controversy, and established a consensus within the church over the divinity of the Son. But further theological construction was necessary. What was

the relation of the Spirit to the Father? And to the Son? There was a growing consensus that the Spirit could not be omitted from the Godhead. The Cappadocian fathers, especially Basil of Caesarea, defended the divinity of the Spirit in such persuasive terms that the foundation was laid for the final element of Trinitarian theology to be put in its place. The divinity and co-equality of Father, Son, and Spirit had been agreed; it now remained to develop Trinitarian models to allow this understanding of the Godhead to be visualized.

Basil of Caesarea (c.330–379). Also known as “Basil the Great,” this fourth-century writer was based in the region of Cappadocia, in modern Turkey. He is particularly remembered for his writings on the Trinity, especially the distinctive role of the Holy Spirit. He was elected bishop of Caesarea in 370.

In general, eastern theology tended to emphasize the distinct individuality of the three persons or hypostases, and safeguard their unity by stressing the fact that both the Son and the Spirit derived from the Father. The relation between the persons or hypostases is ontological, grounded in what those persons are. Thus the relation of the Son to the Father is defined in terms of “being begotten” and “sonship.” As we shall see, Augustine moves away from this approach, preferring to treat the persons in relational terms. We shall return to these points presently, in discussing the *filioque* controversy.

The western approach, however, was more marked by its tendency to begin from the unity of God, especially in the work of revelation and redemption, and to interpret the relation of the three persons in terms of their mutual fellowship. It is this position which is characteristic of Augustine, and which we shall explore later in this case study.

The eastern approach might seem to suggest that the Trinity consists of three independent agents, doing quite different things. This possibility was excluded by two later developments, which are usually referred to by the terms “mutual interpenetration” (*perichoresis*) and “appropriation.” Although these ideas find their full development at a later stage in the development of the doctrine, they are unquestionably hinted at in both Irenaeus and Tertullian, and find more substantial expression in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa. We may usefully consider both these ideas at this stage.

Gregory of Nyssa (c.330–c.395). One of the Cappadocian fathers, noted especially for his vigorous defense of the doctrine of the Trinity and the incarnation during the fourth century.

The Greek term *perichoresis* – which is often found in either its Latin (*circumincessio*) or English (mutual interpenetration) forms – came into general use in the sixth century. It refers to the manner in which the three persons of the Trinity relate to one another. The concept of *perichoresis* allows the individuality of the persons to be maintained, while insisting that each person shares in the life of the other two. An image often used to express this idea is that of “a community of being,” in which each person, while maintaining its distinctive identity, penetrates the others and is penetrated by them.

The idea of “appropriation” is related to *perichoresis*, and follows on from it. The modalist heresy (to be discussed presently) argued that God could be considered as existing in different “modes of being” at different points in the economy of salvation, so that, at one point, God existed as Father and created the world; at another, God existed as Son and redeemed it. The doctrine of appropriation insists that the works of the Trinity are a unity; every person of the Trinity is involved in every outward action of the Godhead. Thus Father, Son, and Spirit are all involved in the work of creation, which is not to be viewed as the work of the Father alone. For example, Augustine of Hippo pointed out that the Genesis creation account speaks of God, the Word, and the Spirit (Genesis 1: 1–3), thus indicating that all three persons of the Trinity were present and active at this decisive moment in salvation history. Yet it is appropriate to think of creation as the work of the Father. Despite the fact that all three persons of the Trinity are implicated in creation, it is properly seen as the distinctive action of the Father. Similarly, the entire Trinity is involved in the work of redemption. It is, however, appropriate to speak of redemption as being the distinctive work of the Son.

Augustine of Hippo (354–430). Widely regarded as the most influential Latin patristic writer, Augustine was converted to Christianity at the northern Italian city of Milan in the summer of 386. He returned to North Africa, and was made bishop of Hippo in 395. He was involved in two major controversies – the Donatist controversy, focusing on the church and sacraments, and the Pelagian controversy, focusing on grace and sin. He also made substantial contributions to the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, and the Christian understanding of history.

Taken together, the concepts of *perichoresis* and appropriation allow us to think of the Godhead as a “community of being,” in which all is shared, united, and mutually exchanged. Father, Son, and Spirit are not three isolated and diverging compartments of a Godhead, like three subsidiary

components of an international corporation. Rather, they are differentiations within the Godhead, which become evident within the economy of salvation and the human experience of redemption and grace. The doctrine of the Trinity affirms that beneath the surface of the complexities of the history of salvation and our experience of God lies one God, and one God only.

Modalism

The term “modalism” was introduced by the German historian of dogma, Adolf von Harnack, to describe the common element of a group of Trinitarian heresies, associated with Noetus and Praxeas in the late second century, and Sabellius in the third. Each of these writers was concerned to safeguard the unity of the Godhead, fearing a lapse into some form of tritheism as a result of the doctrine of the Trinity. (As will become clear, this fear was amply justified.) This vigorous defense of the absolute unity of God (often referred to as “monarchianism,” from the Greek term meaning “a single principle of authority”) led these writers to insist that the one and only God revealed himself in different ways at different times. The divinity of Christ and the Holy Spirit is to be explained in terms of three different ways or modes of divine revelation (hence the term “modalism”). The following Trinitarian sequence is thus proposed:

1. The one God is revealed in the manner of creator and lawgiver. This aspect of God is referred to as “the Father.”
2. The same God is then revealed in the manner of a savior, in the person of Jesus Christ. This aspect of God is referred to as “the Son.”
3. The same God is then revealed in the manner of the one who sanctifies and gives eternal life. This aspect of God is referred to as “the Spirit.”

There is thus no difference, save that of appearance and chronological location, between the three entities in question.

The Cappadocian approach to the Trinity

The Cappadocian fathers played a pivotal role in establishing the full divinity of the Holy Spirit, a decision which was formally endorsed by the Council of Constantinople in 381. Once this decisive theological step had been taken, the way was open to a full statement of the doctrine of the Trinity. With the recognition of the identity of substance of Father, Son, and

Holy Spirit, it was possible to explore their mutual relationship within the Trinity. Once more, the Cappadocians played a decisive role in this major theological development.

The Cappadocian approach to the Trinity is best understood as a defense of the divine unity, coupled with a recognition that the one Godhead exists in three different “modes of being.” The formula that expresses this approach best is “one substance [*ousia*] in three persons [*hypostaseis*].” The one indivisible Godhead is common to all three persons of the Trinity. This one Godhead exists simultaneously in three different “modes of being” – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

One of the most distinctive features of this approach to the Trinity is the priority assigned to the Father. Although the Cappadocian writers stress that they do not accept that either the Son or Spirit is subordinate to the Father, they nevertheless explicitly state that the Father is to be regarded as the source or fountainhead of the Trinity. The being of the Father is imparted to both the Son and the Spirit, although in different ways: the Son is “begotten” of the Father, and the Spirit “proceeds” from the Father. Gregory of Nyssa thus writes of “the one person of the Father, from whom the Son is begotten and the Spirit proceeds.”

So how can the one substance be present in three persons? The Cappadocians answered this question by appealing to the relation between a universal and its particulars – for example, humanity and individual human beings. Thus Basil of Caesarea argues that the one substance within the Trinity can be conceived as analogous to a universal, and the three persons to particulars. A common human nature, shared by all people, does not mean that all human beings are identical; it means that they retain their individuality, even though they share this common nature. Gregory of Nyssa states this as follows:

Peter, James and John are called three humans, even though they share a single common humanity. ... So how do we compromise our belief, by saying on the one hand that the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit have a single godhead, while on the other hand denying that we are talking about three gods?

Thus each of the three persons within the Trinity has a distinctive characteristic. According to Basil of Caesarea, the distinctives of each of the persons are as follows: the Father is distinguished by fatherhood, the

Son by sonship, and the Spirit by the ability to sanctify. For Gregory of Nazianzus, the Father is distinguished by “being ingenerate” (*agennesis*, a difficult word which conveys the idea of “not being begotten” or “not deriving from any other source”), the Son by “being generate” (*gennesis*, which could also be translated as “being begotten” or “deriving one’s origins from someone else”), and the Spirit by “being sent” or “proceeding.” The difficulty with this analogy for modern readers is that it seems to hint at tritheism. While Gregory’s Platonism allows him to think of “Peter, James, and John” as different instances of the same human nature, the more natural way of interpreting the illustration today is in terms of three distinct and independent individuals.

Augustine’s model of the Trinity

Augustine takes up many elements of the emerging consensus on the Trinity. This can be seen in his vigorous rejection of any form of subordinationism (that is, treating the Son and Spirit as inferior to the Father within the Godhead). Augustine insists that the action of the entire Trinity is to be discerned behind the actions of each of its persons. Thus humanity is not merely created in the image of God; it is created in the image of the Trinity. An important distinction is drawn between the eternal Godhead of the Son and the Spirit, and their place in the economy of salvation. Although the Son and Spirit may appear to be posterior to the Father, this judgment only applies to their role within the process of salvation. Although the Son and Spirit may appear to be subordinate to the Father in history, in eternity all are co-equal. This is an important anticipation of the later distinction between the essential Trinity, grounded in God’s eternal nature, and the economic Trinity, grounded in God’s self-revelation within history.

Perhaps the most distinctive element of Augustine’s approach to the Trinity concerns his understanding of the person and place of the Holy Spirit; we shall consider specific aspects of this in a later section, as part of our discussion of the *filioque* controversy. However, Augustine’s conception of the Spirit as the love which unites the Father and Son together demands attention at this early stage.

Having identified the Son with “wisdom,” Augustine proceeds to identify the Spirit with “love.” He concedes that he had no explicit biblical grounds

for this identification; nevertheless, he regards it as a reasonable inference from the biblical material. The Spirit “makes us dwell in God, and God in us.” This explicit identification of the Spirit as the basis of union between God and believers is important, as it points to Augustine’s idea of the Spirit as the giver of community. The Spirit is the gift of God which binds us to him. There is, Augustine argues, therefore a corresponding relation within the Trinity itself. God already exists in the kind of relation to which he wishes to bring us. And just as the Spirit is the bond of union between God and the believer, so the Spirit exercises a comparable role within the Trinity, binding the persons together. “The Holy Spirit ... makes us dwell in God, and God in us. But that is the effect of love. So the Holy Spirit is God who is love.”

This argument is supplemented by a general analysis of the importance of love within the Christian life. Augustine, basing himself loosely on 1 Corinthians 13: 13 (“These three remain: faith, hope, and love. But the greatest of these is love”), argues along the following lines:

1. God’s greatest gift is love;
2. God’s greatest gift is the Holy Spirit;
3. Therefore the Holy Spirit is love.

Augustine brings both these lines of argument together in the following passage:

Love is of God, and its effect in us is that we dwell in God, and he in us. This we know, because he has given us his Spirit. Now the Spirit is God who is love. If, among God’s gifts there is none greater than love, and if there is no greater gift than the Holy Spirit, we naturally conclude that the one who is said to be both God and of God is love.

This style of analysis has been criticized for its obvious weaknesses, not least in leading to a curiously depersonalized notion of the Spirit. The Spirit appears as a sort of glue, binding Father and Son together, and binding both to believers. The idea of “being bound to God” is a central feature of Augustine’s spirituality, and it is perhaps inevitable that this concern will appear prominently in his discussion of the Trinity.

One of the most distinctive features of Augustine’s approach to the Trinity is his development of “psychological analogies.” The reasoning which lies behind the appeal to the human mind in this respect can be summarized as follows. It is not unreasonable to expect that, in creating the

world, God has left a characteristic imprint upon that creation. But where is that imprint (*vestigium*) to be found? It is reasonable to expect that God would plant this distinctive imprint upon the height of his creation. Now the Genesis creation accounts allow us to conclude that humanity is the height of God's creation. Therefore, Augustine argues, we should look to humanity in our search for the image of God.

However, Augustine then takes a step which many observers feel to have been unfortunate. On the basis of his Neoplatonic worldview, Augustine argues that the human mind is to be regarded as the apex of humanity. It is therefore to the individual human mind that the theologian should turn, in looking for "traces of the Trinity" in creation. The radical individualism of this approach, coupled with its obvious intellectualism, means that he chooses to find the Trinity in the inner mental world of individuals, rather than – for example – in personal relationships (an approach favored by medieval writers, such as Richard of St. Victor). Furthermore, a first reading of *On the Trinity* suggests that Augustine seems to regard the inner workings of the human mind as telling us as much about God as the economy of salvation. Although Augustine stresses the limited value of such analogies, he himself appears to make more use of them than this critical appraisal would warrant.

Augustine discerns a triadic structure to human thought, and argues that this structure of thought is grounded in the being of God. He himself argues that the most important such triad is that of mind, knowledge, and love, although the related triad of memory, understanding, and will is also given considerable prominence. The human mind is "an image" – inadequate, to be sure, but still an image – of God. So just as there are three such faculties in the human mind, which are not ultimately totally separate and independent entities, so there can be three "persons" in God.

There are some obvious weaknesses here. As has often been pointed out, the human mind cannot be reduced to three entities in quite this neat and simplistic manner. In the end, however, it must be pointed out that Augustine's appeal to such "psychological analogies" is actually illustrative, rather than constitutive. They are intended to be visual aids (although visual aids that are grounded in the doctrine of creation) to insights that may be obtained from Scripture and reflection on the economy of salvation. Augustine's doctrine of the Trinity is not ultimately grounded

in his analysis of the human mind, but in his reading of Scripture, especially of the **Fourth Gospel**.

Term used to refer to the gospel according to John. It highlights the distinctive literary and theological character of this gospel, which sets it apart from the common structures of the first three gospels.

The filioque controversy

One of the most significant events in the early history of the church was agreement throughout the Roman Empire, both east and west, on the Nicene Creed. The Nicene Creed was intended to bring doctrinal stability to the church in a period of considerable importance in its history. Part of that agreed text referred to the Holy Spirit “proceeding from the Father.” By the ninth century, however, the western church routinely altered this phrase, speaking of the Holy Spirit “proceeding from the Father and the Son.” The Latin term *filioque* (meaning “and from the Son”) has since come to refer to this addition, now normative within the western churches, and the theology which it expresses. This idea of a “double procession” of the Holy Spirit was a source of intense irritation to Greek writers: not only did it raise serious theological difficulties for them; it also involved tampering with the supposedly inviolable text of the creeds. Many scholars see this bad feeling as contributing to the split between the eastern and western churches, which took place around 1054. Although this development (and the resulting controversy) took place after 451, the resulting debate was the inevitable outcome of the ideas documented in this case study, making it entirely proper to discuss this debate at this point.

The *filioque* debate is of importance, both as a theological issue in itself, and also as a matter of some importance in the contemporary relations between the eastern and western churches. We therefore propose to explore the issues in some detail. The basic issue at stake is whether the Spirit may be said to proceed from the Father alone, or from the Father and the Son. The former is associated with the eastern church, and is given its most weighty exposition in the writings of the **Cappadocian fathers**; the latter is associated with the western church, and is developed with particular clarity in Augustine’s treatise *On the Trinity*.

The three major Greek-speaking writers: Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzen, and Gregory of Nyssa (late fourth century, Asia Minor).

The Greek patristic writers insisted that there was only one source of being within the Trinity. The Father alone was the sole and supreme cause of all things, including the Son and the Spirit within the Trinity. The Son and the Spirit derive from the Father, but in different manners. In searching for suitable terms to express this relationship, theologians eventually fixed on two quite distinct images: the Son is begotten of the Father, while the Spirit proceeds from the Father. These two terms are intended to express the idea that both Son and Spirit derive from the Father, but are derived in different ways. The vocabulary is clumsy, reflecting the fact that the Greek words involved are difficult to translate into modern English.

To assist in understanding this complex process, the Greek fathers used two images. The Father pronounces his word; at the same time as he utters this word, he breathes out in order to make this word capable of being heard and received. The imagery used here, which is strongly grounded in the biblical tradition, is that of the Son as the Word of God, and the Spirit as the breath of God. An obvious question arises here: why should the Cappadocian fathers, and other Greek writers, spend so much time and effort on distinguishing Son and Spirit in this way? The answer is important. A failure to distinguish the ways in which Son and Spirit derive from the one and the same Father would lead to God having two sons, which would have raised insurmountable problems.

Within this context, it is unthinkable that the Holy Spirit should proceed from the Father and the Son. Why? Because it would totally compromise the principle of the Father as the sole origin and source of all divinity. It would amount to affirming that there were two sources of divinity within the one Godhead, with all the internal contradictions and tensions that this would generate. If the Son were to share in the exclusive ability of the Father to be the source of all divinity, this ability would no longer be exclusive. For this reason, the Greek church regarded the western idea of a “double procession” of the Spirit with something approaching stark disbelief. The Greek tradition, however, was not entirely unanimous on this point. Cyril of Alexandria had no hesitation in speaking of the Spirit as “belonging to the Son,” and related ideas were not slow to develop within the western church.

This understatement of the procession of the Spirit from Father and Son was developed and given its classic statement by Augustine. Possibly building upon the position hinted at earlier by Hilary of Poitiers (c.315–67),

Augustine argued that the Spirit had to be thought of as proceeding from the Son. One of his main proof texts was John 20: 22, in which the risen Christ is reported as having breathed upon his disciples, and said: “Receive the Holy Spirit.” Augustine explains this as follows:

Nor can we say that the Holy Spirit does not also proceed from the Son. After all, the Spirit is said to be the Spirit of both the Father and the Son [John 20: 22 is then cited]. ... The Holy Spirit proceeds not only from the Father, but also from the Son.

In making this statement, Augustine thought that he was summarizing a general consensus within both the eastern and western churches. Unfortunately, his knowledge of Greek does not appear to have been good enough to allow him to appreciate that the Greek-speaking Cappadocian writers adopted a rather different position. Nevertheless, there are points at which Augustine is obviously concerned to defend the distinctive role of the Father within the Godhead:

God the Father alone is the one from whom the Word is born, and from whom the Spirit principally proceeds. Now I have added the word “principally,” because we find that the Holy Spirit also proceeds from the Son. Nevertheless, the Father gave the Spirit to the Son. It was not as if the Son already existed and possessed the Spirit. Whatever the Father gave to the only-begotten Word, he gave by begetting him. Therefore he begot him in such a way that the common gift should be the Spirit of both.

So what did Augustine think he was doing, in understanding the role of the Spirit in this way? The answer lies in his distinctive understanding of the Spirit as the “bond of love” between Father and Son. Augustine developed the idea of relation within the Godhead, arguing that the persons of the Trinity are defined by their relations to one another. The Spirit is thus to be seen as the relation of love and fellowship between the Father and Son, a relation which Augustine believed to be foundational to the Fourth Gospel’s presentation of the unity of will and purpose of Father and Son.

We can summarize the root differences between the two approaches as follows:

1. The Greek (or eastern) intention was to safeguard the unique position of the Father as the sole source of divinity. In that both the Son and Spirit derive from him, although in different but equally valid manners,

their divinity is in turn safeguarded. To the Greeks, the Latin approach seemed to introduce two separate sources of divinity into the Godhead, and to weaken the vital distinction between Son and Spirit. The Son and Spirit are understood to have distinct, yet complementary roles, whereas the western tradition sees the Spirit as the Spirit of Christ.

2. The Latin (or western) intention was to ensure that the Son and Spirit were adequately distinguished from one another, yet shown to be mutually related to one another. The strongly relational approach adopted to the idea of “person” made it inevitable that the Spirit would be treated in this way. Sensitive to the Greek position, later Latin writers stressed that they did not regard their approach as presupposing two sources of divinity in the Godhead. The Council of Lyons stated that “the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, yet not as from two origins but as from one origin.” However, the doctrine remained a source of contention, and continues to be an issue of dispute today.

Case study 1.6 The church: The Donatist controversy

The Donatist controversy derived its name from Donatus, a North African Christian writer elected as Bishop of Carthage in 315, noted for his rigorist views on church membership and leadership. As we noted in our introductory historical overview of the patristic period, under the Roman emperor Diocletian (284–313) the Christian church was subject to various degrees of persecution. The origins of the persecution date from 303; it finally ended with the victory of Constantine, and the issuing of the Edict of Milan in 313. Under an edict of February 303, Christian books were ordered to be burned and churches demolished. Those Christian leaders who handed over their books to be burned came to be known as *traditores* – “those who handed over [their books].” The modern English word “traitor” derives from the same root. Once such *traditor* or “traitor” was Felix of Aptunga, who later consecrated Caecilian as bishop of Carthage in 311.

Many local Christians were outraged that such a person should have been allowed to be involved in this consecration, and declared that they could not accept the authority of Caecilian as a result. The hierarchy of the Catholic church was tainted as a result of this development. The church ought to be pure, and should not be permitted to include such people. By the time Augustine returned to Africa in 388, a breakaway faction had established itself as the leading Christian body in the region, with especially strong support from the local African population. Sociological issues clouded theological debate; the Donatists tended to draw their support from the indigenous population, whereas the Catholics drew theirs from Roman colonists.

The theological issues involved are of considerable importance, and relate directly to a serious tension within the theology of a leading figure of the African church in the third century – Cyprian of Carthage. In his *The Unity of the Catholic Church* (251), Cyprian had defended two major related beliefs:

1. Schism (that is, the deliberate breaking away from the church) is totally and absolutely unjustified. The unity of the church cannot be

broken, for any pretext whatsoever. To step outside the bounds of the church is to forfeit any possibility of salvation.

2. It therefore follows that a lapsed or schismatic bishop is deprived of all ability to administer the sacraments or act as a minister of the Christian church. By passing outside the sphere of the church, they have lost their spiritual gifts and authority. They should therefore not be permitted to ordain priests or bishops. Any whom they have ordained must be regarded as invalidly ordained; any whom they have baptized must be regarded as invalidly baptized.

Cyprian of Carthage (d.258). A Roman rhetorician of considerable skill who was converted to Christianity around 246, and elected bishop of the North African city of Carthage in 248. He was martyred in that city in 258. His writings focus particularly on the unity of the church, and the role of its bishops in maintaining orthodoxy and order.

Cyprian's arguments against schism are set out with particular clarity, and are worth noting in a little detail, based on the following passage from his classic work *The Unity of the Catholic Church*:

Anyone who cuts themselves off from the Church and is joined to an adulteress is separated from the promises of the Church, and anyone who leaves the Church of Christ behind cannot benefit from the rewards of Christ. Such people are strangers, outcasts, and enemies. You cannot have God as father unless you have the Church as mother. ... This sacrament of unity, this inseparable bond of peace, is shown in the gospel when the robe of the Lord Jesus Christ was neither divided at all or torn, but they cast lots for the clothing of Christ ... so the clothing was received whole and the robe was taken unspoilt and undivided. ... That garment signifies the unity which comes "from the part above," that is, from heaven and from the Father, a unity which could not be torn at all by those who received and possessed it, but it was taken undivided in its unbreakable entirety. Anyone who rends and divides the Church of Christ cannot possess the clothing of Christ.

Note how Cyprian argues that there is only one church. Anyone who chooses to leave the church in schism therefore moves outside the boundaries of the church, and ceases to have any connection with it. It is impossible to benefit from Christ's salvation without being a member of the church. This is summed up in the famous slogan: "You cannot have God as father unless you have the Church as mother." At this point, Cyprian uses a

particularly striking image to stress the indivisibility of the church. The church, he declares, is like the seamless robe in which Christ was clothed as he walked to his crucifixion. Cyprian here alludes to the incident in the gospels, in which those who crucified Jesus threw lots for his robe, in that they did not wish to tear it (see John 19: 23–4). Cyprian argues that the church is analogous to that robe: it cannot be torn or divided.

It will be clear, then, that Cyprian rigorously excludes schism. But what happens if a bishop lapses under persecution, and subsequently repents? Cyprian's theory is profoundly ambiguous, and is open to two lines of interpretation:

1. By lapsing, the bishop has committed the sin of apostasy (literally, “falling away”). He has therefore placed himself outside the bounds of the church, and can no longer be regarded as administering the sacraments validly.
2. By his repentance, the bishop has been restored to grace, and is able to continue administering the sacraments validly.

The Donatists adopted the first such position, the Catholics (as their opponents came to be universally known) the second.

As a result, the Donatists believed that the entire sacramental system of the Catholic church had become corrupted. It was therefore necessary to replace *traditores* with people who had remained firm in their faith under persecution. It was also necessary to rebaptize and reordain all those who had been baptized and ordained by *traditores*. Inevitably, this resulted in the formation of a breakaway faction. By the time of Augustine, the breakaway faction was larger than the church which it had originally broken away from.

Yet Cyprian had totally forbidden schism of any kind. One of the greatest paradoxes of the Donatist schism is that the schism resulted from principles which were due to Cyprian – yet contradicted those very same principles. As a result, both the Donatists and Catholics appealed to Cyprian as an authority – but to very different aspects of his teaching. The Donatists stressed the outrageous character of apostasy; the Catholics equally emphasized the impossibility of schism. A stalemate resulted – that is, until Augustine of Hippo arrived, and became bishop of Hippo in the region. Augustine was able to resolve the tensions within the legacy of Cyprian, and put forward an “Augustinian” view of the church, which has remained

enormously influential ever since. In what follows, we shall outline the main features of this distinctive approach.

First, Augustine emphasizes the sinfulness of Christians. The church is not meant to be a society of saints, but a “mixed body” of saints and sinners. Augustine finds this image in two biblical parables: the parable of the net which catches many fishes, and the parable of the wheat and the tares (note that “tares” is the traditional older English word for “weeds”; we shall use the two terms interchangeably in the following discussion). It is this latter parable (Matthew 13: 24–31) that is of especial importance and requires further discussion.

The parable tells of a farmer who sowed seed, and discovered that the resulting crop included both wheat and tares – grain and weeds. What could be done about it? To attempt to separate the wheat and the weeds while both were still growing would be to court disaster, probably involving damaging the wheat while trying to get rid of the weeds. But at the harvest, all the plants – wheat and tares – are cut down, and sorted out without any danger of damaging the wheat. The separation of the good and the evil thus takes place at the end of time, not in history.

For Augustine, this parable refers to the church in the world. It must expect to find itself including both saints and sinners. But to attempt a separation in this world is premature and improper. That separation will take place in God’s own time, at the end of history. No human can make that judgment or separation in God’s place. So in what sense is the church holy? For Augustine, the holiness in question is not that of its members, but of Christ. The church cannot be a congregation of saints in this world, in that its members are contaminated with original sin. However, the church is sanctified and made holy by Christ – a holiness which will be perfected and finally realized at the Last Judgment. In addition to this theological analysis, Augustine makes the practical observation that the Donatists failed to live up to their own high standards of morality. The Donatists, Augustine suggests, were just as capable as Catholics of getting drunk or beating people up.

Second, Augustine argues that schism and *traditio* (the handing over of Christian books, or any form of lapse from faith) are indeed both sinful – but that, for Cyprian, schism is by far the more serious sin. The Donatists are thus guilty of serious misrepresentation of the teaching of the great North African martyr bishop.

On the basis of these considerations, Augustine argues that Donatism is fatally flawed. The church is, and is meant to be, a mixed body. Sin is an inevitable aspect of the life of the church in the present age, and is neither the occasion nor the justification for schism.

Yet the Donatist controversy concerned more than a theoretical understanding of the nature of the church. It affected aspects of everyday Christian ministry, on account of the Donatist insistence that only certain untainted persons could administer the sacraments properly. The Donatists refused to recognize that a *traditor* could administer the sacraments properly. Accordingly, they argued that baptisms, ordinations, and **eucharists** administered by such ministers were invalid.

Term used in the present volume to refer to the sacrament variously known as “the Mass,” “the Lord’s Supper” and “Holy Communion.”

This attitude rested in part upon the authority of Cyprian of Carthage. Cyprian had argued that no true sacraments exist outside the church. Heretical baptism was thus not valid, as heretics did not accept the faith of the church, and were thus outside its bounds. Logically unassailable though Cyprian’s views may have been, they failed to allow for the situation which arose during the Donatist controversy – that is, ministers who are of orthodox faith, but whose personal conduct is held to be unworthy of their calling. Were doctrinally orthodox yet morally inferior ministers entitled to administer the sacraments? And were such sacraments valid or not?

Pressing Cyprian’s views beyond their apparent intended limits, the Donatists argued that ecclesiastical actions could be regarded as invalid on account of subjective imperfections on the part of the person administering them. The Donatists thus held that those who were baptized or ordained by Catholic priests or bishops who had not joined the Donatist movement were required to be rebaptized and reordained at the hands of Donatist ministers. The sacraments derive their validity from the personal qualities of the person who administers them.

Responding to this approach, Augustine argued that Donatism laid excessive emphasis upon the qualities of the human agent, and gave insufficient weight to the grace of Jesus Christ. It is, he argued, impossible for fallen human beings to make distinctions concerning who is pure and impure, worthy or unworthy. This view, which is totally consistent with his understanding of the church as a “mixed body” of saints and sinners, holds

that the efficacy of a sacrament rests not upon the merits of the individual administering it, but upon the merits of the one who instituted them in the first place – Jesus Christ. The validity of sacraments is independent of the merits of those who administer them.

Having said this, Augustine qualifies it in an important context. A distinction must be drawn, he argues, between “baptism” and “the right to baptize.” Although baptism is valid, even when administered by those who are heretics or schismatics, this does not mean that the right to baptize is indiscriminately distributed among all peoples. The right to confer baptism exists only within the church, and supremely on the part of those ministers which it has chosen and authorized to administer the sacraments. The authority to administer the sacraments of Christ was committed by him to the apostles, and through them and their successors, the bishops, to the ministers of the Catholic church.

The theological issue at stake has come to be represented by two Latin slogans, each reflecting a different understanding of the grounds of the efficacy of the sacraments:

1. Sacraments are efficacious *ex opere operantis* – literally, “on account of the work of the one who works.” Here, the efficacy of the sacrament is understood to be dependent upon the personal qualities of the minister.
2. Sacraments are efficacious *ex opere operato* – literally, “on account of the work which is worked.” Here, the efficacy of the sacrament is understood to be dependent upon the grace of Christ, which the sacraments represent and convey.

The Donatist position is consistent with an *ex opere operantis*, and Augustine’s with an *ex opere operato*, understanding of sacramental causality. The latter view became normative within the western church, and was maintained by the mainstream reformers during the sixteenth century. The former was upheld by more radical sections of the Reformation, and continues to be significant within some sections of Protestantism, especially those stressing the importance of holiness or charismatic gifts.

Augustine sets out his position in the following passage, taken from his treatise “On Baptism.” As we noted earlier, Augustine’s view of the church accepts that congregations and priests will include sinners as well as saints. So does this invalidate the sacraments? Against the Donatist view, which

declared that only the righteous can administer and profitably receive the sacraments (an *ex opere operantis* view of sacramental efficacy), Augustine argues that the efficacy of the sacraments rests on Christ himself, not the merits of either the administrator or recipient (which, as noted above, is an *ex opere operato* view of sacramental efficacy):

In the matter of baptism, we should consider not the identity of the one who gives it, but what it is that he gives; not who he is that receives, but what it is that he receives. ... When baptism is administered by the words of the gospel, however great the evil of either minister or recipient may be, the sacrament itself is holy on account of the one whose sacrament it is. In the case of people who receive baptism from an evil person, if they do not receive the perverseness of the minister but the holiness of the mystery, being united to the church in good faith and hope and charity, they will receive the forgiveness of their sins.

Augustine here draws a fundamental distinction between the one who gives the gift, and the gift that is given. The personal qualities of the “giver” (in this case, the minister of the sacrament) have no bearing on the quality of what is given (that is, the sacrament itself). Sacraments derive thus their efficacy from “the one whose sacrament it is.” In other words, whatever a sacrament does results from the holiness of God, not from holiness (or lack of it) on the part of the minister.

This can be contrasted with the views of Petilian, a noted Donatist writer who was active at the beginning of the fifth century. Petilian, the Donatist bishop of Cirta (a city in North Africa), circulated a letter to his priests warning against the moral impurity and doctrinal errors of the Catholic church. Augustine’s reply, dated 401, led Petilian to write against Augustine in more detail. In this letter, dating from 402, from which Augustine quotes extracts, Petilian sets out fully the Donatist insistence that the validity of the sacraments is totally dependent upon the moral worthiness of those who administer them. Petilian’s words are included within citation marks within Augustine’s text.

“What we look for is the conscience” [Petilian] says, “of the one who gives [the sacraments], giving in holiness, to cleanse the conscience of the one who receives. For anyone who knowingly receives ‘faith’ from the faithless does not receive faith, but guilt.” And he will then go on to say: “So how do you test this? For everything consists of an origin,” he

says, “and a root; if it does not possess something as its head, it is nothing. Nor can anything truly receive a second birth, unless it is born again from good seed.”

Note that Petilian argues that the holiness or guilt of the minister affects the person who receives the sacraments from that minister (lines 1–2). It is therefore essential that ministers should be holy and unblemished if their ministries are not to be compromised through the contaminating effect of sin.

The Donatist controversy was of major importance to the development of the western church during the fourth century. A second controversy to break out in this region of the church – also centering on Augustine of Hippo – concerned the whole issue of the interaction of divine grace and human freedom. It is to the Pelagian controversy that we now turn.

Case study 1.7 Grace: The Pelagian controversy

The Pelagian controversy, which erupted in the early fifth century, brought a cluster of questions concerning human nature, sin, and grace into sharp focus. Up to this point, there had been relatively little controversy within the church over human nature. The Pelagian controversy changed that, and ensured that the issues associated with human nature were placed firmly on the agenda of the western church. The controversy centered upon two individuals: Augustine of Hippo and Pelagius. The controversy is complex, at both the historical and theological levels, and, given its impact upon western Christian theology, needs to be discussed at some length. We shall summarize the main points of the controversy under four heads: (1) the understanding of the “freedom of the will”; (2) the understanding of sin; (3) the understanding of grace; (4) the understanding of the grounds of justification.

The “freedom of the will”

For Augustine, the total sovereignty of God and genuine human responsibility and freedom must be upheld at one and the same time, if justice is to be done to the richness and complexity of the biblical statements on the matter. To simplify the matter, denying either the sovereignty of God or human freedom is to seriously compromise the Christian understanding of the way in which God justifies man. In Augustine’s own lifetime, he was obliged to deal with two heresies which simplified and compromised the gospel in this way. Manicheism was a form of fatalism (to which Augustine himself was initially attracted) that upheld the total sovereignty of God but denied human freedom, while Pelagianism upheld the total freedom of the human will while denying the sovereignty of God. Before developing these points, it is necessary to make some observations concerning the term “free will.”

The term “free will” (Latin: *liberum arbitrium*) is not itself biblical, but derives from Greek philosophical movements, especially Stoicism. It was introduced into western Christianity by the second-century theologian

Tertullian. Augustine retained the term, but attempted to restore a more Pauline meaning to it by emphasizing the limitations placed upon the human free will by sin. Augustine's basic ideas can be summarized as follows. First, natural human freedom is affirmed: we do not do things out of any necessity, but as a matter of freedom. Second, Augustine argues that human free will has been weakened and incapacitated – but not eliminated or destroyed – through sin. In order for that free will to be restored and healed, it requires the operation of divine grace. Free will really does exist; it is, however, distorted by sin.

In order to explain this point, Augustine deploys a significant analogy. Consider a pair of scales, with two balance pans. One balance pan represents good, and the other evil. If the pans are properly balanced, the arguments in favor of doing good or doing evil could be weighed, and a proper conclusion drawn. The parallel with the human free will is obvious: we weigh up the arguments in favor of doing good and evil, and act accordingly. But what, asks Augustine, if the balance pans are loaded? What happens if someone puts several heavy weights in the balance pan on the side of evil? The scales will still work, but they are seriously biased toward making an evil decision. Augustine argues that this is exactly what has happened to humanity through sin. The human free will is biased toward evil. It really exists, and really can make decisions – just as the loaded scales still work. But instead of giving a balanced judgment, a serious bias exists toward evil. Using this and related analogies Augustine argues that the human free will really exists in sinners, but that it is compromised by sin.

For Pelagius and his followers (such as Julian of Eclanum), however, humanity possessed total freedom of the will, and was totally responsible for its own sins. Human nature was essentially free and well created, and was not compromised or incapacitated by some mysterious weakness. According to Pelagius, any imperfection in man would reflect negatively upon the goodness of God. For God to intervene in any direct way to influence human decisions was equivalent to compromising human integrity. Going back to the analogy of the scales, the Pelagians argued that the human free will was like a pair of balance pans in perfect equilibrium, and not subject to any bias whatsoever. There was no need for divine grace in the sense understood by Augustine (although Pelagius did have a quite distinct concept of grace, as we shall see later).

Pelagius. A British theologian who was active at Rome in the final decade of the fourth century and the first decade of the fifth. No reliable information exists concerning the date of his birth or death. Pelagius was a moral reformer, whose theology of grace and sin brought him into sharp conflict with Augustine, leading to the Pelagian controversy. Pelagius's ideas are known mostly through the writings of his opponents, especially Augustine.

In 413, Pelagius wrote a lengthy letter to Demetrias, who had recently decided to turn her back on wealth in order to become a nun. In this letter, Pelagius spelled out with remorseless logic the consequences of his views on human free will. God has made humanity, and knows precisely what it is capable of doing. Hence all the commands given to us are capable of being obeyed, and are meant to be obeyed. It is no excuse to argue that human frailty prevents these commands from being fulfilled. God has made human nature, and only demands of it what it can endure. Pelagius thus makes the uncompromising assertion that since perfection is possible for humanity, it is obligatory:

[Instead of regarding God's commands as a privilege] ... we cry out at God and say, "This is too hard! This is too difficult! We cannot do it! We are only human, and hindered by the weakness of the flesh!" What blind madness! What blatant presumption! By doing this, we accuse the God of knowledge of a twofold ignorance – ignorance of God's own creation and of God's own commands. It would be as if, forgetting the weakness of humanity – his own creation – God had laid upon us commands which we were unable to bear. And at the same time – may God forgive us! – we ascribe to the righteous One unrighteousness, and cruelty to the Holy One; first, by complaining that God has commanded the impossible, second, by imagining that some will be condemned by God for what they could not help; so that – the blasphemy of it! – God is thought of as seeking our punishment rather than our salvation. ... No one knows the extent of our strength better than the God who gave us that strength. ... God has not willed to command anything impossible, for God is righteous; and will not condemn anyone for what they could not help, for God is holy.

Note especially the argument that God knows our weakness, and therefore asks nothing of us which we cannot achieve. A demand on the part of God therefore corresponds to a human ability to fulfill that demand.

The nature of sin

For Augustine, humanity is universally affected by sin as a consequence of the Fall. The human mind has become darkened and weakened by sin. Sin makes it impossible for the sinner to think clearly, and especially to understand higher spiritual truths and ideas. Similarly, as we have seen, the human will has been weakened (but not eliminated) by sin. For Augustine, the simple fact that we are sinners means that we are in the position of being seriously ill, and unable to diagnose our own illness adequately, let alone cure it. It is through the grace of God alone that our illness is diagnosed (sin), and a cure made available (grace).

The essential point which Augustine makes is that we have no control over our sinfulness. It is something that contaminates our lives from birth, and dominates our lives thereafter. It is a state over which we have no decisive control. We could say that Augustine understands humanity to be born with a sinful disposition as part of human nature, with an inherent bias toward acts of sinning. In other words, sin causes sins: the state of sinfulness causes individual acts of sin. Augustine develops this point with reference to three important analogies: original sin as a “disease,” as a “power,” and as “guilt.”

1. The first analogy treats sin as a hereditary disease, which is passed down from one generation to another. As we saw above, this disease weakens humanity, and cannot be cured by human agency. Christ is thus the divine physician, by whose “wounds we are healed” (Isaiah 53: 5), and salvation is understood in essentially sanative or medical terms. We are healed by the grace of God, so that our minds may recognize God and our wills may respond to the divine offer of grace.
2. The second analogy treats sin as a power which holds us captive, and from whose grip we are unable to break free by ourselves. The human free will is captivated by the power of sin, and may only be liberated by grace. Christ is thus seen as the liberator, the source of the grace which breaks the power of sin.
3. The third analogy treats sin as an essentially judicial or forensic concept – guilt – which is passed down from one generation to another. In a society which placed a high value on law, such as the later Roman Empire, in which Augustine lived and worked, this was regarded as a particularly helpful way of understanding sin. Christ thus comes to bring forgiveness and pardon.

For Pelagius, however, sin is to be understood in a very different light. The idea of a human disposition toward sin has no place in Pelagius's thought. For Pelagius, the human power of self-improvement could not be thought of as being compromised. It was always possible for humans to discharge their obligations toward God and their neighbors. Failure to do so could not be excused on any grounds. Sin was to be understood as an act committed willfully against God. Pelagianism thus seems to be a rigid form of moral authoritarianism – an insistence that humanity is under obligation to be sinless, and an absolute rejection of any excuse for failure. Humanity is born sinless, and only sins through deliberate actions. Pelagius insisted that many Old Testament figures actually remained sinless. Only those who were morally upright could be allowed to enter the church – whereas Augustine, with his concept of fallen human nature, was happy to regard the church as a hospital where fallen humanity could recover and grow gradually in holiness through grace.

The nature of grace

One of Augustine's favorite biblical texts is John 15: 5, "apart from me you can do nothing." For Augustine, we are totally dependent upon God for our salvation, from the beginning to the end of our lives. Augustine draws a careful distinction between the natural human faculties – given to humanity as its natural endowment – and additional and special gifts of grace. God does not leave us where we are naturally, incapacitated by sin and unable to redeem ourselves, but gives us grace in order that we may be healed, forgiven, and restored. Augustine's view of human nature is that it is frail, weak, and lost, and needs divine assistance and care if it is to be restored and renewed. Grace, according to Augustine, is God's generous and quite unmerited attention to humanity, by which this process of healing may begin. Human nature requires transformation through the grace of God, so generously given.

Pelagius uses the term "grace" in a very different way. First, grace is to be understood as the natural human faculties. For Pelagius, these are not corrupted or incapacitated or compromised in any way. They have been given to humanity by God, and they are meant to be used. When Pelagius asserts that humanity can, through grace, choose to be sinless, what he means is that the natural human faculties of reason and will should enable

humanity to choose to avoid sin. As Augustine was quick to point out, this does not seem to be what the New Testament understands by the term.

Second, Pelagius understands grace to be external enlightenment provided for humanity by God. Pelagius gives several examples of such enlightenment – for example, the Ten Commandments, and the moral example of Jesus Christ. Grace informs us what our moral duties are (otherwise, we would not know what they were); it does not, however, assist us to perform them. We are enabled to avoid sin through the teaching and example of Christ. Augustine argued that this was “to locate the grace of God in the law and in teaching.” The New Testament, according to Augustine, envisaged grace as divine assistance to humanity, rather than just moral guidance. For Pelagius, grace was something external and passive, something outside us. Augustine understood grace as the real and redeeming presence of God in Christ within us, transforming us; something that was internal and active.

The basis of salvation

For Augustine, humanity is justified as an act of grace: even human good works are the result of God working within fallen human nature. Everything leading up to salvation is the free and unmerited gift of God, given out of love for sinners. Through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God is enabled to deal with fallen humanity in this remarkable and generous manner, giving us that which we do not deserve (salvation), and withholding from us that which we do deserve (condemnation).

Augustine’s exposition of the parable of the laborers in the vineyard (Matthew 20: 1–10) is of considerable importance in this respect. As we shall see, Pelagius argued that God rewarded each individual strictly on the basis of merit. Augustine, however, points out that this parable indicates that the basis of the reward given to the individual is the promise made to that individual. Augustine emphasizes that the laborers did not work for equal periods in the vineyard, yet the same wage (a denarius) was given to all. The owner of the vineyard had promised to pay each individual a denarius, providing he worked from the time when he was called to sundown – even though this meant that some worked all day, and others only for an hour.

Augustine thus draws the theologically important conclusion that the basis of our justification is the divine promise of grace made to us. God is faithful to that promise, and thus justifies sinners. Just as the laborers who began work in the vineyard so late in the day had no claim to a full day's wages, except through the generous promise of the owner, so sinners have no claim to justification and eternal life, except through the gracious promises of God, received through faith.

For Pelagius, however, humanity is justified on the basis of its merits: human good works are the result of the exercise of the totally autonomous human free will, in fulfillment of an obligation laid down by God. A failure to meet this obligation opens the individual to the threat of eternal punishment. Jesus Christ is involved in salvation only to the extent that he reveals, by his actions and teaching, exactly what God requires of the individual. If Pelagius can speak of "salvation in Christ," it is only in the sense of "salvation through imitating the example of Christ."

It will thus be clear that Pelagianism and Augustinianism represent two radically different outlooks, with very divergent understandings of the manner in which God and humanity relate to one another. Augustinianism would eventually gain the upper hand within the western theological tradition; nevertheless, Pelagianism continued to exercise influence over many Christian writers down the ages, not least those who felt that an emphasis upon the doctrine of grace could too easily lead to a devaluation of human freedom and moral responsibility.

The general lines of Augustine's position can be studied from the following extract from his treatise "On Nature and Grace," originally written in 415. Augustine here identifies the consequences of the Fall for human nature. Originally created without any fault, human nature is now contaminated by sin, and can only be redeemed through grace:

Human nature was certainly originally created blameless and without any fault; but the human nature by which each one of us is now born of Adam requires a physician, because it is not healthy. All the good things, which it has by its conception, life, senses, and mind, it has from God, its creator and maker. But the weakness which darkens and disables these good natural qualities, as a result of which that nature needs enlightenment and healing, did not come from the blameless maker but from original sin, which was committed by free will [*liberum arbitrium*]. ... But God, who is rich in mercy, on account of the great

love with which He loved us, even when we were dead through our sins, raised us up to life with Christ, by whose grace we are saved. But this grace of Christ, without which neither infants nor grown persons can be saved, is not bestowed as a reward for merits, but is given freely [*gratis*], which is why it is called grace [*gratia*].

In the first part of the passage, Augustine uses primarily medical imagery to describe the impact of sin on human nature – as seen in his use of the terms “physician,” “healthy,” “healing.” Note especially the emphasis on the original integrity of creation (line 1). Augustine’s concern here is to defend God against any charge that God is somehow responsible for sin or evil within the world. The present imperfection of the world does not result from God’s creation, but from original sin and the abuse of human free will. Augustine then establishes a connection between the Latin words *gratis* (“freely” or “without cost”) and *gratia* (“grace”). He then uses this point to reinforce his argument that salvation cannot be considered to be a reward, somehow earned through human merit, status, or achievement; rather, it is a gift.

Case study 1.8 Faith and philosophy

Christianity had its origins in Palestine. However, it soon began to expand along the borders of the Mediterranean Sea. Christian expansion into regions such as Egypt, Asia Minor, and Greece raised important issues for Christian writers. One of the most significant concerned the relationship of Christianity and classical philosophy. Much of the civilized world in this region spoke Greek, and had at least some degree of familiarity with the ideas of classical Greek philosophy, whether this took the form of classical Platonism, Middle Platonism, or occasionally revived versions of classical paganism. The question therefore arose: how does the Christian gospel relate to these ways of thinking? Does it totally contradict them? Or were these classical ways of thinking in some way a form of preparation for the Christian gospel, which built on their foundations? To anticipate a question raised by Tertullian: what does Jerusalem have to do with Athens?

A description of the early confrontation between Christianity and classical paganism is found in Paul's Areopagus address at Athens, documented in Acts 17. In this address, Paul appears to argue that the Christian gospel resonates with and builds upon central Stoic philosophical beliefs. What the Greeks held to be unknown, possibly unknowable, Paul argues to have been made known through Christ. A deity of whom Greek philosophy had some implicit or intuitive awareness is being made known to them by name and in full. The god who is known indirectly through the creation can be known directly and more fully in redemption.

Approaches along these lines can be found in the writings of patristic theologians active in cultural situations in which various forms of classic Greek philosophy were a significant presence. In what follows, we shall explore the approaches associated with Justin Martyr and Clement of Alexandria, both of whom were concerned to demonstrate that Christianity was consistent with certain forms of Platonism.

In his two apologies for the Christian faith, written in Greek in Rome at some point during the period 148–61, Justin sets out a vigorous defense of Christianity, in which he seeks to relate the gospel to secular wisdom. The idea of the "Logos" is of major importance to Justin, and needs to be considered. The Greek term "Logos" (best translated as "Word") was used within Middle Platonism to refer to the mediating principle between the

world of ideas and the everyday world. The term is applied to Jesus Christ in John's gospel (see John 1: 14, which declares that "the Logos became flesh, and dwelled among us"). Justin uses this statement to argue that all wisdom derives from the Logos, which is fully revealed in Jesus Christ, although it is not restricted to him:

Christ is the firstborn of God, and we have proclaimed that he is the Logos, in whom every race of people have shared. And those who live according to the Logos are Christians, even though they may have been counted as atheists – such as Socrates and Heraclitus, and others like them, among the Greeks. ... Whatever either lawyers or philosophers have said well, was articulated by finding and reflecting upon some aspect of the Logos. However, since they did not know the Logos – which is Christ – in its entirety, they often contradicted themselves. ... Whatever all people have said well belongs to us Christians. For we worship and love, next to God, the Logos, who comes from the unbegotten and ineffable God, since it was for our sake that he became a human being, in order that he might share in our sufferings and bring us healing. For all writers were able to see the truth darkly, on account of the implanted seed of the Logos which was grafted into them.

A central theme in Justin's argument is the idea that God has scattered "the seeds [*spermata*] of his Logos" throughout the world before the coming of Christ, so that secular wisdom and truth can point, however imperfectly, to Christ. It follows that those who tried to live according to this "Logos" before the coming of Christ can be thought of as Christians, even though they would not have thought of themselves in this way. This aspect of Justin's teaching would be repudiated by most other writers of the patristic period, who felt that he had gone too far in his attempts to relate faith and philosophy.

Note especially the following points:

1. Justin argues that Jesus Christ is the Logos. All true human wisdom derives from this Logos, whether this is explicitly recognized or not. Philosophical tensions and contradictions arise through incomplete access to the Logos – but such full access is now possible through Jesus Christ (lines 6–9).
2. Anyone who tries to act according to this Logos can be thought of as a Christian – including Socrates. This aspect of Justin's teaching proved

controversial.

3. Anything that is good and true in secular philosophy may therefore be accepted and honored by Christians, in that it derives from the Logos.

Clement of Alexandria (c.150–c.215). A leading Alexandrian writer, with a particular concern to explore the relation between Christian thought and Greek philosophy.

A related approach is adopted a little later by Clement of Alexandria, who aims to bring out the way in which classical philosophy can be thought of as preparing the way for the gospel. Clement argues that God gave philosophy to the Greeks as a way of preparing them for the coming of Christ, in more or less exactly the same way as he gave the Jews the law of Moses. While not allowing that philosophy has the status of revelation, Clement goes beyond Justin Martyr's suggestion that the mere seeds of the Logos are to be found in Greek philosophy:

Until the coming of the Lord, philosophy was necessary to the Greeks for righteousness. And now it assists those who come to faith by way of demonstration, as a kind of preparatory training for true religion. For “you will not stumble” (Proverbs 3: 23) if you attribute all good things to providence, whether it belongs to the Greeks or to us. For God is the source of all good things, some directly (as with the Old and the New Testaments), and some indirectly (as with philosophy). But it might be that philosophy was given to the Greeks immediately and directly, until such time as the Lord should also call the Greeks. For philosophy acted as a “schoolmaster” to bring the Greeks to Christ, just as the law brought the Hebrews. Thus philosophy was by way of a preparation, which prepared the way for its perfection in Christ.

Note especially the following points:

1. Classical philosophy is seen as having a definite place in the “economy of salvation.” In other words, Clement argues that, in the providence of God, philosophy had a place in preparing the way for the coming of Christ.
2. After the coming of Christ, philosophy retains an important role as a “kind of preparatory training” (lines 1–3). Clement clearly regards philosophy in a positive light, and sees it as a route leading to, rather than a rival worldview leading away from, Christianity.

3. Note the analogy between philosophy and the Old Testament (lines 8–9). Clement’s argument seems to be that, just as God provided the Old Testament law to prepare Israel for the coming of Christ, so God provided philosophy to prepare the Greeks for his coming.

4. Christ is thus seen as the perfection and fulfillment of philosophy.

Yet not all early Christian writers shared such a positive attitude to classical philosophy. The third-century Roman writer Tertullian is an example of a patristic writer who had serious misgivings concerning the place of philosophy within Christian thought, arguing that it could be profoundly misleading at points. Philosophy, he argued, was pagan in its outlook, and its use in theology could only lead to heresy within the church. In his “On the Rule of the Heretics,” written in Latin in the first years of the third century, Tertullian sets up a celebrated contrast between Athens and Jerusalem, symbolizing the tension between pagan philosophy and the revelation of the Christian faith. Note that reference to the “Academy” is not a general reference to the academic world, but specifically to the Platonic Academy at Athens. For Tertullian, the pagan ideas of “the Academy” have no place within Christianity:

Philosophy provides the material of worldly wisdom, in boldly asserting itself to be the interpreter of the divine nature and dispensation. The heresies themselves receive their weapons from philosophy. It was from this source, that Valentinus, who was a disciple of Plato, got his ideas about the “aeons” and the “trinity of humanity.” ... What is there in common between Athens and Jerusalem? between the Academy and the church? Our system of beliefs comes from the Porch of Solomon, who himself taught that it was necessary to seek God in the simplicity of the heart.

Tertullian argues that, as a matter of historical fact, heresies seem to derive many of their leading ideas from secular Greek philosophy. This, in his view, is enough to raise very serious questions concerning the use of such philosophies in theology. So why should Christianity pay any attention to philosophy, when it is so clearly biased toward secular ideas? What has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What has the Platonic Academy got to do with the Christian church?

Tertullian’s points could, of course, be met by arguing for the need to critically appropriate the ideas of philosophy. It could be argued that Justin

and Clement were perhaps unduly optimistic in their attitude toward secular philosophy, while Tertullian was too negative. Not every idea found in Greek philosophy was right, just as not every idea was wrong. It is this kind of approach that we find in the early writings of Augustine, to which we now turn.

In his work “On Christian Doctrine,” originally written in Latin around 397, Augustine deals at some length with the relation between Christianity and pagan philosophy. Using the exodus from Egypt as a model, Augustine argues that there is no reason why Christians should not extract all that is good in philosophy and put it to the service of preaching the gospel. The analogy which he uses to justify this approach is found in the Book of Exodus in the Old Testament, which tells of the circumstances under which Israel left Egypt – an event which is universally known as “the Exodus.” Israel was oppressed while in Egypt; on escaping, the people left behind those burdens, yet carried off the treasures of their former oppressors. So, Augustine argues, just as Israel left behind the burdens of Egypt while carrying off its treasures, so theology can discard what is useless in philosophy and exploit what is good and useful:

If those who are called philosophers, particularly the Platonists, have said anything which is true and consistent with our faith, we must not reject it, but claim it for our own use ... Pagan learning is not entirely made up of false teachings and superstitions. It contains also some excellent teachings, well suited to be used by truth, and excellent moral values. Indeed, some truths are even found among them which relate to the worship of the one God. Now these are, so to speak, their gold and their silver, which they did not invent themselves, but which they dug out of the mines of the providence of God ... The Christian, therefore, can separate these truths from their unfortunate associations, take them away, and put them to their proper use for the proclamation of the gospel.

Augustine’s argument proved to be both influential and productive. In effect, he advocates a method of “critical appropriation” of the ideas and methods of secular philosophy. Where they are right and helpful, they can be adopted; where they are wrong or destructive, they are to be ignored. Christians can filter out what is good and true from secular philosophy, and put it to the service of the Christian gospel.

It is widely agreed that the movement within Christianity which explored the relation between Christian faith and philosophy to greatest effect was “scholasticism,” a movement which flowered during the Middle Ages. We shall explore this rich intellectual tradition in case study 2.1. Before that, however, we turn to the general exploration of this major period in the history of Christian thought.

2

The Middle Ages and the Renaissance, c.500–1500

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The Middle Ages represented an immensely creative and innovative period in Christian theology. The courts, monasteries, and later the universities of Europe became centers of excellence for theological reflection and the forging of new approaches to the relation of Christian thought and life. The period was given an added injection of vitality through the rise of the Renaissance. This dynamic cultural program looked for the reinvigoration of the life and thought of the church and society as a whole through the creative reappropriation of the classical past. As so many theological landmarks date from this period, it is important to identify and reflect on its achievements and contributions to the theological agenda.

On Defining the “Middle Ages”

It is always difficult to be precise about when one era ends and another begins. Traditionally, accounts of the development of Christian theology proceed directly from the close of the patristic period, marked by the Council of Chalcedon (451), to the great theological renaissance in western Europe during the Middle Ages. This is unsatisfactory for many reasons. The most obvious of these is that the “Middle Ages” is a cultural development that is specific to western Europe. It overlooks the fact that the Roman Empire in the east was relatively unaffected by the fall of Rome in 410. The development of Byzantine theology does not easily fit the categories of western European history. It also overlooks earlier renewals in Christian theology in the west – for example, the important developments that took place during the reign of Charlemagne, the first Holy Roman Emperor. This “Carolingian renaissance,” which began in the eighth century and continued well into the ninth, saw some particularly important theological developments, especially in relation to the theology of the **sacraments**.

Church service or rite held to have been instituted by Jesus Christ.

The terms “medieval” and “Middle Ages” are modern, signifying the period of transition between the intellectual glories of antiquity and those of the modern period. Although phrases similar to “medieval” are encountered in the medieval period itself, their meaning is quite distinct from the modern sense of the term. Thus Julian of Toledo (died c.685) uses the phrase “the middle age” or “the middle of time [*tempus medium*]” to refer to the period between the **Incarnation** and the second coming of Christ. Since the Renaissance, the term has been used in a somewhat disparaging sense, to meet the somewhat uninteresting period of time separating the intellectual glories of antiquity and their retrieval in the Renaissance.

Term used to refer to the assumption of human nature by God, in the person of Jesus Christ.

The expansion of Islam around the Mediterranean in the seventh century led to widespread political destabilization and further structural changes in the region. By the eleventh century, a degree of stability had settled upon

the area, three major power groupings having emerged to take the place of the former Roman Empire:

1. Byzantium, centered on the city of Constantinople (now Istanbul, in modern-day Turkey). The form of Christianity which predominated in this region was based on the Greek language, and was deeply rooted in the writings of patristic scholars of the eastern Mediterranean region, such as Athanasius, the Cappadocian fathers, and John of Damascus. A discussion of some distinctive themes of Byzantine theology may be found on pp. 87–8.

2. Western Europe, mainly regions such as France, Germany, the Low Countries, and northern Italy. The form of Christianity which came to dominate this region was centered on the city of Rome, and its bishop, known as “the pope.” (However, for the period known as the “Great Schism,” some confusion developed: there were two rival claimants for the papacy, one based at Rome, the other at the southern French city of Avignon.) Here, theology came to be concentrated in the great cathedral and university schools of Paris and elsewhere, based largely on the Latin writings of Augustine, Ambrose, and Hilary of Poitiers.

3. The Caliphate, an Islamic region embracing much of the extreme eastern and southern parts of the Mediterranean. The expansion of Islam continued, with the fall of Constantinople in 1453 sending shock waves throughout much of Europe. By the end of the fifteenth century, Islam had established a significant presence in two regions of the continent of Europe: Spain and the Balkans. This advance was eventually halted by the expulsion of the Moors from Spain in the final decade of the fifteenth century, and the defeat of Islamic armies outside Vienna in 1523.

An event of fundamental importance to the history of the church took place during this period. For a variety of reasons, relations between the eastern church based at Constantinople and the western church based at Rome became increasingly strained during the ninth and tenth centuries. Growing disagreement over the *filioque* clause in the Nicene Creed (see pp. 60–1) was of no small importance to this increasingly sour atmosphere. Other factors also contributed, including the political rivalry between Latin-speaking Rome and Greek-speaking Constantinople, and the increasing claims to authority of the Roman pope. The final break between the

Catholic west and Orthodox east is usually dated to 1054, although this date is somewhat arbitrary.

One major result of this tension was that there was little theological interaction between east and west. Although western theologians such as Thomas Aquinas felt free to draw on the writings of the Greek fathers, these works tended to antedate this period. The works of later Orthodox theologians, such as the noted writer Gregory Palamas, attracted little attention in the west. It is only in the twentieth century that western theology may really be said to have begun to rediscover the riches of the Orthodox tradition.

The term “medieval theology” is often used to refer to western theology during this era, whereas the term “Byzantine theology” is used to refer to the theology of the eastern church over roughly the same period, prior to the fall of Constantinople in 1453. During this period in western European history, the centers of Christian theology gradually moved northward, to central France and Germany. Although Rome remained a center of Christian power in the region, intellectual activity gradually came to migrate to the monasteries of France, such as Chartres, Reims, and Bec. With the foundation of the medieval universities, theology rapidly established itself as a central area of academic study. A typical medieval university possessed four faculties: the lower faculty of arts, and the three higher faculties of theology, medicine, and law. In what follows, we shall consider some of these developments in western Europe, before turning to consider developments in Byzantium.

Medieval Theological Landmarks in Western Europe

Historians have debated for some time the question of when the “Middle Ages” can be said to have begun. The answers given to this question depend, as might be expected, on matters of definition. The practically simultaneous suppression of the Athenian Platonic academy and the establishment of the great monastery at Monte Cassino in 529 are regarded by many as marking, although not in themselves causing, the transition from late antiquity to the medieval period. For some, the medieval period is regarded as having been initiated through Alaric’s conquest of Rome in 410, with the resulting gradual shift in the centers of intellectual life from the Mediterranean world to the northern European world of Theodoric and Charlemagne, and later to the abbey and cathedral schools of France, and the universities of Paris and Oxford. We may therefore begin our brief survey of the development of western medieval theology by considering the revival of its fortunes under the first Holy Roman Emperor, Charlemagne (742–814).

The Carolingian renaissance

Under Charlemagne, a concerted effort was directed toward renewing the life of the mind within the church. Perhaps the most important figure in this theological renewal was Alcuin (735–804), who had trained at the cathedral school of York, before becoming its master. At Charlemagne's invitation, Alcuin became abbot of the monastery of St. Martin of Tours, which he established as a leading center of learning. A series of imperial decrees established two kinds of theological school throughout northern Europe. First, there were the monastic schools, which were intended primarily for the instruction of those intending to proceed to monastic vocations. Secondly, there were cathedral schools, set up by the bishop and presided over by a *magister scholarum* or *scholasticus*. One of the results of the Carolingian renaissance was the recognition of the importance of monasteries and cathedrals as seats of learning. The great monastery of Fulda, founded in Germany in 744, became one of the most significant centers of theological and secular learning in the region. Rabanus Maurus, Walafried Strabo, Servatus Lupus, and Otfried of Weissenburg studied there in the eighth and ninth centuries.

In the end, the Carolingian renaissance faltered, due to growing political instability and economic uncertainties. Yet the institutions identified by Charlemagne as central to the tasks of theological education remained, and were able to play a critical role in bringing about the theological renaissance of the twelfth century. We shall consider this development in what follows.

The rise of cathedral and monastic schools of theology

The origins of the monastic movement are generally thought to lie in remote hilly areas of Egypt and parts of eastern Syria during the patristic period. Significant numbers of Christians began to make their homes in these regions in order to get away from the population centers, with all the distractions that these offered. The theme of withdrawal from a sinful and distracting world became of central importance to these communities. While some lone figures insisted on the need for individual isolation, the concept of a communal life in isolation from the world gained the ascendancy.

During the sixth century, the number of monasteries grew considerably. It was during this period that one of the most comprehensive monastic “Rules” – the “Rule of Benedict” – made its appearance. Benedict of Nursia (c.480–c.550) established his monastery at Monte Cassino at some point around 525. The Benedictine community followed a rule which was dominated by the notion of the unconditional following of Christ, sustained by regular corporate and private prayer, and the reading of Scripture. Benedict’s sister, Scholastica, was also active in the monastic movement.

Although the origin of the monasteries is to be traced back to the patristic era, they played a critical role in the development of theology during the medieval period. Most of the great medieval schools of theology are associated with France. One of the most important was linked to the great cathedral of Chartres. Under the leadership of Fulbert (c.960–1028), bishop of Chartres from 1006 until his death, Chartres became one of the most important centers of theological learning in the eleventh century. The Benedictine abbey of Bec, or Le Bec, in Normandy, provided a base for two of the most important theologians of the eleventh century, Lanfranc (c.1010–89) and Anselm (c.1033–1109).

The great convents of the Middle Ages provided bases for women writers to exercise a significant influence on the thinking of the church. A good example is provided by Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179), Abbess of Rupertsberg, near the city of Bingen, who established a reputation as a theological and spiritual writer of considerable originality. She is best

known for her *Liber divinorum operum* (“Book of divine works”), which was written over the period 1163–73. Catherine of Siena (1347–80), remembered for a series of theological writings, often in the form of dialogues, was a Dominican tertiary (that is, a layperson who observed a modified version of the Dominican rule).

Not all women theological writers of the Middle Ages were based in convents, however. The English recluse Julian of Norwich (c.1342–c.1415), remembered for her *Revelations of Divine Love*, appears to have led a solitary life. Mechthild of Magdeburg (c.1210?–c.1282) is widely celebrated as one of the most important women spiritual writers of the thirteenth century. She is best known for her *Flowing Light of the Godhead*, which includes her visionary experiences, as well as letters of advice and criticism, allegories, reflections, and prayers. Mechthild was a beguine – that is, a woman with a religious vocation who was not bound by vows, did not live in an enclosed community, and did not totally renounce the possibility of marriage.

The great cathedral of Laon, northwest of Paris, became the site of a very significant school of theology under Anselm of Laon (d.1117), attracting scholars of the caliber of Peter Abelard during its heyday. The Royal Abbey of St. Victor, founded in Paris in the twelfth century, became one of the most important centers of theological education, and was of major importance in shaping the theological curriculum at the fledgling University of Paris. Among its twelfth-century luminaries we may note Hugh of St. Victor, Peter Lombard, Andrew of St. Victor, and Richard of St. Victor.

The rise of importance of these schools is linked with another development, to which we now turn – the emergence of distinctive styles of theology, linked with specific religious orders.

The religious orders and their “schools of theology”

The Middle Ages witnessed the founding of several major new religious orders. In 1097, the Cistercian order was founded at Cîteaux, in the middle of the wild countryside around the River Saône. One of the most noted Cistercian leaders was the great spiritual writer and preacher Bernard of Clairvaux (1090–1153). By the dawn of the fourteenth century, it is estimated that some 600 Cistercian monasteries or convents had come into being.

Two other major orders were founded more than a century later – the Franciscans and Dominicans. The Franciscans were founded by Francis of Assisi (c.1181–1226), who renounced a life of wealth to live a life of prayer and poverty. He was joined by Clare of Assisi, formerly a noblewoman, who founded the order of “Poor Clares.” The Franciscans were often referred to as “Grey Friars,” on account of the dark grey habits they wore. The order was distinguished by its emphasis on individual and corporate poverty.

The Dominicans (sometimes referred to as “Black Friars” on account of their black mantle worn over a white habit) were founded by the Spanish priest Dominic de Guzman (1170–1221), with a particular emphasis on education. By the end of the Middle Ages, the Dominicans had established houses in most major European cities, and made a significant contribution to the intellectual life of the church.

From the standpoint of the development of theology, it is important to appreciate that distinct schools of theology came to be associated with particular monastic orders. Not all religious orders regarded academic theology as being of importance. The Cistercians, for example, placed a particular emphasis on spirituality, rather than more academic forms of theology. Three religious orders may be noted as having had a particularly significant impact on the shaping of medieval theology. In each case, a distinctive style of theology developed within the order, which distinguished it from others.

1. *The Dominicans.* The distinctive theological position of this order was developed by such major writers as Albert the Great, Thomas

Aquinas, and Peter of Tarantaise.

2. *The Franciscans*. Three major theologians of the Middle Ages were associated with this order: Bonaventura, Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham.

3. *The Augustinians*. The distinctive theological position of this order was developed initially by Giles of Rome (c.1244–1316), and subsequently by later writers such as Thomas of Strasbourg (c.1275–1357).

The importance of these distinctive schools of theology is evident throughout this period, and continues into the sixteenth century. It is impossible to understand the development of the theological ideas of Martin Luther (originally an Augustinian friar) or the theological debates at the Council of Trent without having some knowledge of these schools.

The founding of the universities

The restoration of some degree of political stability in France in the late eleventh century encouraged the reemergence of the University of Paris, which rapidly became recognized as the intellectual center of Europe. A number of theological “schools” were established on the Left Bank, and on the Ile de la Cité, in the shadow of the newly built cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris.

One such school was the Collège de la Sorbonne, which eventually achieved such fame that “the Sorbonne” came to be a short-hand way of referring to the University of Paris as a whole. Even in the sixteenth century, Paris was widely recognized as a leading center for theological and philosophical study, including among its students such prominent individuals as Erasmus of Rotterdam and John Calvin. Other such centers of study were soon established elsewhere in Europe. A new program of theological development began, concerned with consolidating the intellectual, legal, and spiritual aspects of the life of the Christian church.

The University of Paris soon established itself as a leading center of theological speculation, with such scholars as Peter Abelard (1079–1142), Albert the Great (c.1200–80), Thomas Aquinas (c.1225–74), and Bonaventure (c.1217–74). Initially, the most significant rival to Paris was the University of Oxford, in England. However, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries witnessed a considerable expansion of the university sector in western Europe, with major new universities being founded in Germany and elsewhere.

Peter Lombard's *Four Books of the Sentences*

The medieval period was characterized by its attempts to accumulate biblical and patristic material considered to be relevant to particular issues of theological interpretation, and by its attempt to develop **hermeneutical** methods to resolve the apparent contradictions encountered in this process. These collections of patristic “sentences” appear to have been modeled upon the codifications of the canonists, who initially grouped their collected decretals (papal letters that were regarded as settling disputed matters of church law) chronologically, and later according to subjects. Prosper of Aquitaine’s *Liber sententiarum ex operibus Augustini* (“Book of sentences from the works of Augustine”) is an early example of this phenomenon. These collections of patristic “sentences” were largely drawn from the works of Augustine. The most famous of them became a standard medieval theological textbook.

The principles underlying the interpretation of a text, particularly of Scripture.

A central resource to the new medieval interest in theology is also linked with Paris. At some point shortly before 1140, Peter Lombard arrived at the university to teach. One of his primary concerns was to get his students to wrestle with the thorny issues of theology. His contribution was a textbook – his *Sententiarum libri quattuor*, or *Four Books of the Sentences*, bring together quotations from Scripture and the patristic writers, arranged topically. The work has often been styled as an “Augustinian breviary,” in that roughly 80 percent of its text is taken up by a thousand citations from Augustine. The task Peter set his students was simple: to construct a theology which was able to reconcile the various quotations he had assembled. The book proved to be of major importance in developing the Augustinian heritage, in that students were obliged to wrestle with the ideas of Augustine, and reconcile apparently contradictory texts by devising suitable theological explanations of the inconsistencies.

Some writers attempted to have the book banned, noting its occasional incautious statements (such as the opinion that Christ did not exist as a person, a view which came to be known as “Christological nihilism”).

However, by 1215 the work was firmly established as the most important textbook of the age. It became obligatory for theologians to study and comment on Lombard's work. The resulting writings, known as *Commentaries on the Sentences*, became one of the most familiar theological genres of the Middle Ages. Outstanding examples include those of Thomas Aquinas, Bonaventure, and Duns Scotus. The work was still used in the sixteenth century, and was even annotated by Martin Luther.

The Rise of Scholasticism

Scholasticism derives its name from the great medieval *scholae* (“schools”), in which the classic questions of theology and philosophy were debated. Although often portrayed negatively, scholasticism needs to be seen in a much more positive light – as an attempt to create a bold and brilliant synthesis of Christian ideas, capable of undergirding every aspect of life. It can be thought of as a “cathedral of the mind” (Etienne Gilson) – an attempt to do with ideas what the great medieval masons did with stones, as they constructed some of the most admired and visited buildings the world has ever known. At its best, scholastic theology is to the world of ideas what those cathedrals are to the world of architecture.

How may scholasticism be defined? Like many other significant cultural terms, such as “humanism” and “Enlightenment,” it is difficult to offer a precise definition, capable of doing justice to all the distinctive positions of the major schools within the Middle Ages. Perhaps the following working definition may be helpful: scholasticism is best regarded as the medieval movement, flourishing in the period 1200–1500, which placed emphasis upon the rational justification of religious belief and the systematic presentation of those beliefs. “Scholasticism” thus does not refer to a *specific system of beliefs*, but to a *particular way of doing and organizing theology* – a highly developed method of presenting material, making fine distinctions, and attempting to achieve a comprehensive view of theology.

Scholasticism may be argued to have made major contributions in a number of key areas of Christian theology, especially in relation to the discussion of the role of reason and logic in theology. The writings of Thomas Aquinas, Duns Scotus, and William of Ockham – often singled out as the three most influential of all scholastic writers – make massive contributions to this area of theology, which have served as landmarks ever since.

The Italian Renaissance

The French term “Renaissance” is now universally used to designate the literary and artistic revival in fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Italy. In 1546 Paolo Giovio referred to the fourteenth century as “that happy century in which Latin letters are conceived to have been reborn [*renatae*],” anticipating this nomenclature. Certain historians, most notably Jacob Burckhardt, argued that the Renaissance gave birth to the modern era. It was in this era, Burckhardt claimed, that human beings first began to think of themselves as *individuals*. In many ways, Burckhardt’s definition of the Renaissance in purely individualist terms is highly questionable. But in one sense, he is unquestionably correct: *something* novel and exciting developed in Renaissance Italy that proved capable of exercising a fascination over generations of thinkers.

It is not entirely clear why Italy became the cradle of this brilliant new movement in the history of ideas. A number of factors have been identified as having some bearing on the question:

1. Scholastic theology – the major intellectual force of the medieval period – was never particularly influential in Italy. Although many Italians achieved fame as theologians (including Thomas Aquinas and Gregory of Rimini), they generally lived and worked in northern Europe. There was thus an intellectual vacuum in Italy during the fourteenth century. Vacuums tend to get filled – and Renaissance humanism managed to occupy this particular gap.
2. Italy was saturated with visible and tangible reminders of the greatness of antiquity. The ruins of ancient Roman buildings and monuments were scattered throughout the land, and appear to have aroused interest in the civilization of ancient Rome at the time of the Renaissance, acting as a stimulus to its thinkers to recover the vitality of classical Roman culture at a time that was culturally arid and barren.
3. As Byzantium began to crumble – Constantinople finally fell to Islamic invaders in 1453 – there was an exodus of Greek-speaking intellectuals westward. Italy happened to be conveniently close to Constantinople, with the result that many such émigrés settled in Italian

cities. A revival of the Greek language was thus inevitable, and with it a revival of interest in the Greek classics.

It will be clear that a central component of the worldview of the Italian Renaissance is a return to the cultural glories of antiquity, and a marginalization of the intellectual achievements of the Middle Ages. Renaissance writers had scant regard for the latter, regarding them as outweighed by the greater achievements of antiquity. What was true of culture in general was also true of theology: they regarded the late classical period as totally overshadowing the theological writings of the Middle Ages, both in substance and in style. Indeed, the Renaissance may partly be seen as a reaction against the type of approach increasingly associated with the faculties of arts and theology of northern European universities. Irritated by the technical nature of the language and discussions of the scholastics, the writers of the Renaissance bypassed them altogether. In the case of Christian theology, the key to the future lay in a direct engagement with the text of Scripture and the writings of the patristic period. We shall explore this matter further shortly (see pp. 115–18).

The Rise of Humanism

In the modern period, the term “humanism” has come to designate a worldview which denies the existence or relevance of God, or which is committed to a purely secular outlook. This is certainly not what the word meant at the time of the Renaissance. Most humanists of the period were religious, and were concerned to purify and renew Christianity, rather than eliminate it. And how would this process of regeneration take place? By a return to the fountainheads of western thought.

The humanist program was set out in the Latin slogan *ad fontes* (“back to the sources”), which set out the vision of returning to the wellspring and source of modern western culture in the ancient world, allowing its ideas and values to refresh and renew that culture. The classical period was to be both a resource and a norm for the Renaissance. In art and architecture, as in the written and spoken word, antiquity was seen as a cultural resource that could be appropriated by the Renaissance. In the case of Christian humanism, believers would return directly to the simplicities of the New Testament, bypassing the complex theological programs of the Middle Ages. But it would be the original Greek text of the New Testament, not the Vulgate Latin translation, widely used by medieval theologians.

One of the most significant theological developments associated with the rise of humanism is the increased questioning of the reliability of the Vulgate text. If this translation proved unreliable, in the light of an increased understanding of the Greek and Hebrew languages, and an increased recognition of studying the Bible in those original languages, what of the theological ideas that might be dependent on such faulty translations? We shall return to this point later in this chapter (pp. 97–8).

Having thus far concentrated on western Europe, we must now turn to consider some of the important developments that took place in eastern Europe during this period.

Medieval Theological Landmarks in Eastern Europe

Byzantine theology takes its name from the Greek city of Byzantium, which Constantine chose as the site of his new capital city in 330. At this point, it was renamed Constantinople (“the city of Constantine”). However, the name of the older town remained in use, and gave its name to the distinctive style of theology which flourished in this region until the fall of the city to invading Islamic armies in 1453. Constantinople was not the only center of Christian thought in the eastern Mediterranean. Egypt and Syria had been centers of theological reflection for some time. However, as political power increasingly came to be concentrated on the imperial city, so its status as a theological center advanced correspondingly.

During the time of Justinian (527–56) Byzantine theology began to emerge as an intellectual force of some considerable importance. As the eastern and western churches became increasingly alienated from each other (a process which had begun long before the final **schism** of 1054), so Byzantine thinkers often emphasized the divergence from western theology (for example, in relation to the *filioque* clause: see p. 60), thus reinforcing the distinctiveness of their approach through polemical writings. For example, Byzantine writers tended to understand salvation primarily in terms of *deification*, rather than western legal or relational categories. In addition, they found themselves puzzled by the doctrines of purgatory which were gaining the ascendancy in western Catholic circles. Any attempt to achieve a degree of reunion between east and west during the Middle Ages was thus complicated by a complex network of political, historical, and theological factors. By the time of the fall of Constantinople, the differences between east and west remained as wide as ever.

Deliberate break with the unity of the church.

The emergence of Byzantine theology

In order to understand the distinctive nature of Byzantine theology, it is necessary to appreciate the ethos which lies behind it. Byzantine theologians were not particularly concerned with systematic formulations of the Christian faith. For them, Christian theology was something “given,” and which therefore required to be defended against its opponents and explained to its adherents. The idea of “systematic theology” is somewhat foreign to the general Byzantine ethos. Even John of Damascus (c.675–c.749), whose work *De fide orthodoxa* (“On the orthodox faith”) is of considerable importance in the consolidation of a distinctively eastern Christian theology, is to be seen as an expositor of the faith, rather than as a speculative or original thinker.

Byzantine theology can be regarded as remaining faithful to a principle originally set out by Athanasius, in his writing *De incarnatione* (“On the Incarnation”), which affirmed that theology was the expression of the mind of the saints. Byzantine theology (including its modern descendants in both Greek and Russian Orthodoxy) is thus strongly orientated toward the idea of *paradosis* (“tradition”), particularly the writings of the Greek fathers. Writers such as Gregory of Nyssa, Maximus the Confessor, and the writer who adopted the pseudonym “Dionysius the Areopagite,” are of particular importance in this respect.

The iconoclastic controversy

Two controversies are of particular importance. The first, which broke out during the period 725–842, is usually referred to as the iconoclastic (“breaking of images”) controversy. It erupted over the decision of emperor Leo III (717–42) to destroy icons, on the ground that they were barriers to the conversion of Jews and Moslems. The controversy was mainly political, although there were some serious theological issues at stake, most notably the extent to which the doctrine of the Incarnation justified the depiction of God in the form of images.

John of Damascus played a major role in this controversy. One of his fundamental arguments in favor of the use of icons was his belief that the material world possesses the capacity to signify and mediate the spiritual world:

Is not the ink in the most holy gospel book matter? Is not the life-giving altar, from which we receive the bread of life, constructed from matter? Are not gold and silver matter? Yet from them, we make crosses, patens and chalices. And more importantly than any of these things, are not the body and blood of our Lord matter? Either dispense with the honor and veneration that these things deserve, or accept the tradition of the church and the veneration of images.

The hesychastic controversy

The second controversy, which broke out in the fourteenth century, focused on the issue of hesychasm (Greek: *hesychia* = silence), a style of meditation through physical exercises which enabled believers to see the “divine light” with their own eyes. Hesychasm placed considerable emphasis upon the idea of “inner quietness” as a means of achieving a direct inner vision of God. It was particularly associated with writers such as Symeon the New Theologian and Gregory Palamas (c.1296–1359), who was elected as Archbishop of Thessalonika in 1347. Its opponents argued that its methods tended to minimize the difference between God and creatures, and were particularly alarmed by the suggestion that God could be “seen.”

In responding to this criticism, Palamas developed the doctrine now generally known as “Palamism,” which draws a distinction between the divine energies and the divine essence. The distinction allowed Palamas to defend the hesychastic approach by affirming that it enabled believers to encounter the divine energies, but not the unseen and ineffable divine essence. Believers cannot participate directly in the divine essence; however, they are able to participate directly in the uncreated energies which are God’s mode of union with believers.

Palamas’s theology was espoused and developed particularly by the lay theologian Nicolas Cabasilis (c.1320–c.1390), whose *Life in Christ* remains a classic work of Byzantine spirituality. His work has been reappropriated in more recent years by neo-Palamite writers such as Vladimir Lossky and John Meyendorff.

The fall of Constantinople (1453)

The golden era of Byzantine theology came to an end in 1453, when the great city of Constantinople finally fell to the Turks. It was the end of an age. With the fall of Byzantium, intellectual and political leadership within Orthodoxy largely passed to Russia. The Russians had been converted through Byzantine missions in the tenth century, and took the side of the Greeks in the schism of 1054. By the end of the fifteenth century, Moscow and Kiev were firmly established as patriarchates, each with its own distinctive style of Orthodox theology. It was only when Greece, now part of the Ottoman Empire, finally broke free from Turkish rule in 1829 that the renewal of Orthodox theology in that region was able to begin.

It will be clear from the material presented in this chapter that both western and eastern Christian theology underwent significant development during the Middle Ages and Renaissance. Subsequent generations of theologians have regarded the period as being of landmark significance in relation to several areas of theological reflection, with a number of its writers being regarded as possessing permanent importance. The rise and fall of Byzantium is of particular importance to a full understanding of the subsequent development of eastern Orthodoxy in Russia and Greece, just as the rise of scholasticism and humanism were of considerable importance to the shaping of western theology.

Key Theologians

Of the many theologians of importance to have emerged during this period of enormous creativity, the following are of especial interest and importance.

John of Damascus

The Syrian theologian known as “John of Damascus” (c.675–c.749) was one of the eastern church’s most influential thinkers, and is often regarded as the last of the Greek fathers. At this time, Islam was sweeping through much of North Africa and the Levant, and Syria was firmly under Islamic control. John was brought up within the household of the caliph of Damascus, Abdul Malek, and succeeded his father as the caliph’s chief financial officer. We know little about him, and are dependent upon unreliable later sources for the fragmentary information that has been passed down to us. At some point, probably around the year 735, he resigned his position within the caliph’s court, and entered the monastery of St. Sabas, southeast of Jerusalem.

At an early stage in his career, he was drawn into the iconoclastic controversy, and vigorously opposed those who wanted to destroy icons. Paradoxically, John’s position within an Islamic household prevented his many enemies in Byzantium from taking any action against him. His defense of the use of icons involves an appeal to the doctrine of the Incarnation, both as a basis of establishing the divine willingness to become visible, and for the use of material forms to represent the divine likeness or convey divine truths.

John is remembered for his work *The Fountain of Wisdom* (*Pege gnoseos*), which consists of three parts. The first part deals principally with Aristotle’s concept of ontology, apparently on the assumption that this would assist with the understanding of Christian doctrine. The second part is an updated reworking of an earlier work on heresy by Epiphanius. The third part is the most important and interesting. Entitled “A Precise Analysis of the Orthodox Faith,” this section sets out in detail the fundamentals of the Christian faith, as John has received them from earlier writers. This section of the treatise is often treated as a work in its own right, and is generally referred to simply as “the Orthodox Faith.” It was highly regarded by both Latin- and Greek-speaking Christians, and was translated into Latin in 1150 by Burgundius of Pisa. This translation is cited by both Peter Lombard in his *Four Books of the Sentences*, and Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologiae*.

Simeon the New Theologian

Simeon (or “Symeon,” 949–1022) was born into a wealthy family in Paphlagonia, Asia Minor, in 949. His given name was “George”; he subsequently changed it to “Simeon.” At the age of 11, he was sent to the great city of Constantinople for further study. Although his parents had aspirations that he would go on to a political career, John had a spiritual experience at the age of 20 which convinced him of the importance of a direct encounter with God. Although he did not immediately give up on his political hopes, his ecstatic experience of God as a living presence of radiant life had clearly made a deep impression on him. At the age of 27 he entered the monastery of Studios, and came under the spiritual direction of Symeon the Pious, changing his name as a mark of respect for his mentor. He subsequently entered the monastery of St. Mamas in Constantinople, where he was ordained priest, and eventually became the abbot of the monastery. During this period, he set about renewing the monastery’s life of prayer and meditation, and wrote a number of spiritual treatises, emphasizing the power of contemplative prayer and meditation.

Simeon remains one of the most important theological influences on modern Orthodoxy, reflecting the high regard in which he is held. His theology echoes many of the now-traditional themes of Byzantine doctrine, particularly an emphasis upon the doctrine of the Incarnation, and an accentuation on redemption as deification. He is called “Symeon the New Theologian” within Orthodoxy to distinguish him from John the Evangelist (known as “John the Theologian”) on the one hand, and Gregory of Nazianzus (known as “Gregory the Theologian” in the eastern Orthodox tradition).

Anselm of Canterbury

Anselm (c.1033–1109) was born in northern Italy, but soon moved to France, then establishing a reputation as a center for learning. He quickly mastered the arts of logic and grammar, and acquired a formidable reputation as a teacher at the Norman abbey of Bec. Standing at the dawn of the theological renaissance of the twelfth century, Anselm made decisive contributions in two areas of discussion: proofs for the existence of God, and the rational interpretation of Christ's death upon the cross.

The *Proslogion* (the word is virtually untranslatable) was written around 1079. It is a remarkable work, in which Anselm sets himself the task of formulating an argument which will lead to belief in the existence and character of God as the highest good. The resulting analysis, often known as the "ontological argument," leads to the derivation of the existence of God from an affirmation of his being "that than which nothing greater can be conceived." Although the argument has been contested since its inception, it has remained one of the most intriguing components of philosophical theology to this day. The *Proslogion* is also of importance on account of its clear appeal to reason in matters of theology, and its appreciation of the role of logic. In many ways, the work anticipates the best aspects of scholastic theology. Anselm's phrase *fides quaerens intellectum* ("faith seeking understanding") has passed into widespread use.

Following the Norman invasion of England (1066), Anselm was invited to become Archbishop of Canterbury in 1093, thus ensuring the consolidation of Norman influence over the English church. It was not an entirely happy period of his life, due to a series of violent disputes between the church and the monarchy over land rights. During one period spent working away from England in Italy, Anselm penned perhaps his most important work, *Cur Deus homo* ("Why God became man"). In this work Anselm seeks to set out a rational demonstration of the necessity of God becoming man, and an analysis of the benefits which accrue to humanity as a result of the incarnation and obedience of the Son of God. This argument, to be considered at length later in this work, remains of foundational importance to any discussion of "theories of the atonement" – in other words, understandings of the meaning of the death and resurrection of Christ, and its significance for humanity. Once more, the work exhibits the

characteristics which are typical of scholasticism at its best: the appeal to reason, the logical marshaling of arguments, the relentless exploration of the implications of ideas, and the fundamental conviction that, at its heart, the Christian gospel *is* rational, and can be *shown* to be rational.

Thomas Aquinas

Aquinas (c.1225–74) was born at the castle of Roccasecca in Italy, the youngest son of Count Landulf of Aquino. To judge by his nickname – “the dumb ox” – he was rather portly. In 1244, while in his late teens, Aquinas decided to join the Dominican order, also known as the “Order of Preachers.” His parents were hostile to this idea: they rather hoped he would become a Benedictine, and perhaps end up as abbot of Monte Cassino, one of the most prestigious positions in the medieval church. His brothers forcibly imprisoned him in one of the family’s castles for a year to encourage him to change his mind. Despite this intense opposition from his family, Aquinas eventually got his way, and ended up becoming one of the most important religious thinkers of the Middle Ages. One of his teachers is reported to have said that “the bellowing of that ox will be heard throughout the world.”

Aquinas began his studies at Paris, before moving to Cologne in 1248. In 1252 he returned to Paris to study theology. Four years later he was granted permission to teach theology at the university. For the next three years he lectured on Matthew’s Gospel and began to write the *Summa contra Gentiles*, “Summary against the Gentiles.” In this major work Aquinas provided important arguments in favor of the Christian faith for the benefit of missionaries working among Muslims and Jews. In 1266 he began the most famous of his many writings, usually known by its Latin title, *Summa Theologiae*. In this work Thomas developed a detailed study of key aspects of Christian theology (such as the role of reason in faith), as well as a detailed analysis of key doctrinal questions (such as the divinity of Christ). The work is divided into three parts, with the second part subdivided into two. Part I deals chiefly with God the creator; Part II – divided into two sections known as the *prima secundae* and the *secunda secundae* (literally, the “first of the second” and the “second of the second”) – with the restoration of humanity to God; and Part III with the manner in which the person and work of Christ bring about the salvation of humanity.

On December 6, 1273, Aquinas declared that he could write no longer. “All that I have written seems like straw to me,” he said. It is possible that he may have had some sort of breakdown, perhaps brought on by overwork. He died on March 7, 1274. Among Aquinas’s many contributions to

theology, the following may be noted: his famous “Five Ways” (arguments for the existence of God); his development of the principle of analogy, which provides a theological foundation for knowing God through the creation; and his extended discussions of the relation between faith and reason.

Duns Scotus

Scotus (c.1265–1308) was unquestionably one of the finest minds of the Middle Ages. In his short life he taught at Cambridge, Oxford, and Paris, and produced three versions of a *Commentary on the Sentences*. Known as the “subtle doctor” on account of the very fine distinctions he frequently drew between the possible meanings of terms, he was responsible for a number of developments of considerable significance to Christian theology.

Scotus was a champion of the theory of knowledge associated with Aristotle. The earlier Middle Ages were dominated by a different theory of knowledge, going back to Augustine of Hippo, known as “illuminationism,” in which knowledge was understood to arise from the illumination of the human intellect by God. This view, which was championed by writers such as Henry of Ghent, was subjected to devastating criticism by Scotus.

Scotus was also a champion of the notion of “voluntarism,” which regarded the divine will as taking precedence over the divine intellect. Where Thomas Aquinas had argued for the primacy of the divine intellect, Scotus opened the way to new approaches to theology, based on the assumption of the priority of the divine will. An example illustrates the point. Consider the idea of merit – that is to say, a human moral action which is deemed worthy of reward by God. What is the basis of this decision? Aquinas argued that the divine intellect recognized the inherent worth of the human moral act. It then informed the will to reward it appropriately. Scotus argued along very different lines. The divine will to reward the moral action came before any evaluation of its inherent worth. This approach is of considerable importance in relation to the doctrines of justification and predestination, and will be considered in more detail later.

One of Scotus’s theological concerns related to the doctrine of the immaculate conception of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Thomas Aquinas had taught that Mary shared the common sinful condition of humanity. She was tainted by sin (Latin: *macula*) like everyone else, apart from Christ. Scotus, however, argued that Christ, by virtue of his perfect work of redemption, was able to keep Mary free from the taint of original sin. Such was the influence of Scotus that the “immaculate position” (from the Latin *immacula*, “free of sin”) became dominant by the end of the Middle Ages.

William of Ockham

In many ways, Ockham (c.1285–1347) may be regarded as developing some of the lines of argument associated with Scotus. Of particular importance is his consistent defense of a voluntarist position, giving priority to the divine will over the divine intellect. It is, however, probably his philosophical position which has ensured his permanent place of note in the history of Christian theology.

Perhaps Ockham is best known for the method known as “Ockham’s razor,” often also referred to as “the principle of parsimony.” Ockham insisted that simplicity was both a theological and a philosophical virtue. His “razor” eliminated all hypotheses which were not absolutely essential. Yet Ockham was also a vigorous defender of nominalism. In part, this resulted from his use of his own “razor”: universals were declared to be a totally unnecessary hypothesis. The growing impact of the “modern way” in western Europe owes a considerable debt to him. One aspect of his thought which proved to be of especial importance is the “dialectic between the two powers of God.” This device allowed Ockham to contrast the way things are with the way things could have been. A full discussion of this follows later; for the moment it is enough to note that Ockham made a decisive contribution to discussions of divine omnipotence, which are of continuing importance today.

Erasmus of Rotterdam

Desiderius Erasmus (c.1469–1536) is generally regarded as the most important humanist writer of the Renaissance, and had a profound impact upon Christian theology during the first half of the sixteenth century. Although not Protestant in any sense of the term, Erasmus did much to lay the intellectual foundations of the Reformation, not least through his extensive editorial undertakings, including the production of the first printed text of the Greek New Testament (see pp. 116–18). His *Enchiridion militis Christiani* (“Handbook of the Christian soldier”) was a landmark in religious publishing.

The *Enchiridion* developed the revolutionary and highly attractive thesis that the church of the day could be reformed by a collective return to the writings of the fathers and the Bible. The regular reading of Scripture is put forward as the key to a new lay piety, on the basis of which the church may be renewed and reformed. Erasmus conceived of his work as a layperson’s guide to Scripture, providing a simple yet learned exposition of the “philosophy of Christ.” This “philosophy” is really a form of practical morality, rather than an academic philosophy. The New Testament concerns the knowledge of good and evil, in order that its readers may eschew the latter and love the former. The New Testament is the *lex Christi*, “the law of Christ,” which Christians are called to obey. Christ is the example whom Christians are called to imitate. Yet Erasmus does not understand Christian faith to be a mere external observance of a moral code. His characteristically humanist emphasis upon inner religion leads him to suggest that reading of Scripture *transforms* its readers, giving them a new motivation to love God and their neighbors.

Erasmus also undertook extensive scholarly projects, two of which are of especial importance to the development of Christian theology. First, Erasmus was responsible for the production of the first published Greek New Testament. As noted earlier, this allowed theologians direct access to the original text of the New Testament, with explosive results. Second, Erasmus undertook extensive editorial work, leading to the production of reliable editions of patristic works, including the writings of Augustine. Theologians thus had access to the full texts of such major works, instead of having to rely upon second-hand quotations, known as “sentences,” often

taken out of context. A new understanding of Augustine's theology began to develop as a result, with significant implications for the theological development of the period.

Key Theological Developments

The major renaissance in theology which took place during the period under consideration focused on a number of issues, of which the following are of especial importance. They will simply be noted briefly at this point; detailed discussion of most of them will take place later in this work. The first six such developments are associated with scholasticism (see p. 84), the last two with humanism (see pp. 85–6).

The consolidation of the patristic heritage

During the theological renaissance of the twelfth century and following, Christian theologians saw themselves as consolidating and extending the rich heritage of theological resources passed on to them from the patristic era. In that the western church was Latin-speaking, it was natural that its theologians should turn to the substantial collection of works by Augustine of Hippo, and take this as a starting point for their own theological speculations. Peter Lombard's *Four Books of the Sentences* may be regarded as a critical compilation of quotations ("Sentences") drawn largely from the writings of Augustine, upon which medieval theologians were required to comment.

The exploration of the role of reason in theology

The new concern to establish Christian theology upon a totally reliable foundation led to a considered exploration of the role of reason in theology, a central and defining characteristic of scholasticism (see p. 84). As the theological renaissance of the early Middle Ages proceeded, two themes began to dominate theological debate: the need to *systematize* and *expand* Christian theology; and the need to *demonstrate the inherent rationality* of that theology. Although most early medieval theology was little more than a replay of the views of Augustine, there was growing pressure to systematize Augustine's ideas and take them further. But how could this be done? A "theory of method" was urgently needed. And on the basis of what philosophical system could the rationality of Christian theology be demonstrated?

The eleventh-century writer Anselm of Canterbury gave expression to this basic belief of the rationality of the Christian faith in two phrases which have come to be linked with his name: *fides quaerens intellectum* ("faith seeking understanding") and *credo ut intellegam* ("I believe, in order that I may understand"). His basic insight was that, while faith came before understanding, the content of that faith was nevertheless rational. These definitive formulae established the priority of faith over reason, just as they asserted the entire reasonableness of faith. In the preface to his *Monologium* Anselm stated explicitly that he would establish nothing in Scripture on the basis of Scripture itself; instead, he would establish everything that he could on the basis of "rational evidence and the natural light of truth." Nevertheless, Anselm is no rationalist; reason has its limits!

The eleventh and early twelfth centuries saw a growing conviction that philosophy could be an invaluable asset to Christian theology at two different levels. In the first place, it could demonstrate the reasonableness of faith, and thus defend it against non-Christian critics. In the second place, it offered ways of systematically exploring and arranging the articles of faith, so that they could be better understood. But which philosophy? The answer to this question came through the rediscovery of the writings of Aristotle, in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries. By about 1270, Aristotle had

become established as “the Philosopher.” His ideas came to dominate theological thinking, despite fierce opposition from more conservative quarters.

Through the influence of writers such as Thomas Aquinas and Duns Scotus, Aristotle’s ideas became established as the best means of consolidating and developing Christian theology. The ideas of Christian theology were thus arranged and correlated systematically, on the basis of Aristotelian presuppositions. Equally, the rationality of Christian faith was demonstrated on the basis of Aristotelian ideas. Thus, some of Thomas Aquinas’s famous “proofs” for the existence of God actually rely on principles of Aristotelian physics, rather than on any distinctively Christian insights.

Initially, this development was welcomed by many, who saw it as providing important ways of defending the rationality of the Christian faith – a discipline which has since come to be known as “apologetics,” from the Greek word *apologia* (defense). Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa contra Gentiles* is an excellent example of a work of theology which draws on Aristotelianism as a common philosophy shared by Christians and Muslims, which would allow the attractiveness of the Christian faith to be explained within the Islamic world. At points, Aquinas’s argument seems to work like this: if you can agree with the Aristotelian ideas presented in this writing, then you ought to become a Christian. As Aristotle was highly regarded by many Muslim academics of the period, Thomas can be seen as exploiting the apologetic potential of this philosopher.

This development came to be viewed with concern by some late medieval writers, such as Hugolino of Orvieto. A number of central Christian insights seemed to have been lost, according to such critics, as a result of a growing reliance upon the ideas and methods of a pagan philosopher. Particular concern centered on the doctrine of justification, in which Aristotelian ethical ideas came to play a significant role. The idea of the “righteousness of God” came to be discussed in terms of the Aristotelian idea of “distributive justice.” Here, “righteousness” (*iustitia*) was defined in terms of “giving someone what they are entitled to.” This seemed to lead to a doctrine of justification by merit. In other words, justification takes place on the basis of entitlement, rather than grace. It can be shown without difficulty that this concern lies behind Martin Luther’s growing dislike of Aristotle, and his eventual break with scholastic doctrines of justification.

The development of theological systems

We have already noted the pressure to consolidate the patristic, especially the Augustinian, heritage (p. 93). This pressure to systematize, which is integral to scholasticism, led to the development of the sophisticated theological systems which Etienne Gilson, a noted historian of the period, described as “cathedrals of the mind.” This development is perhaps best seen in Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae*, which represents one of the most forceful statements of the comprehensive and all-embracing character of this approach to Christian theology.

The development of sacramental theology

The early church had been somewhat imprecise in its discussion of the sacraments. There was little general agreement concerning either how the term “sacrament” was to be defined, or what items were to be included in a list of the sacraments. Baptism and eucharist were generally agreed to be sacramental; sadly, there was relatively little agreement on anything else. However, with the theological renaissance of the Middle Ages, the church was coming to play an increasingly important role in society. There was new pressure for the church to place its acts of public worship on a secure intellectual footing, and to consolidate the theoretical aspects of its worship. As a result, sacramental theology developed considerably during the period. Agreement was reached on the definition of a sacrament, the number of the sacraments, and the precise identity of these sacraments.

The development of the theology of grace

A central element of the Augustinian heritage was a theology of grace. However, Augustine's theology of grace had been stated in a polemical context. In other words, Augustine had been obliged to state his theology of grace in the heat of a controversy, often in response to the challenges and provocations of his opponents. As a result, his writings on the subject were often unsystematic. Occasionally, Augustine developed distinctions in response to the needs of the moment, and failed to lay an adequate theological foundation for at least some of them. The theologians of the Middle Ages saw themselves as charged with the task of consolidating Augustine's doctrine of grace, placing it upon a more reliable foundation, and exploring its consequences. As a result, the doctrines of grace and justification were developed considerably during the period, laying the foundation for the Reformation debates over these central issues.

The role of Mary in the scheme of salvation

This new interest in grace and justification led to a new concern to understand the role of Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, in salvation. Growing interest in devotion to Mary, linked with intense theological speculation concerning the nature of original sin and redemption, led to a series of developments relating to Mary. Many of these are linked with Duns Scotus, who placed Mariology (that is, the area of theology dealing with Mary) on a considerably more developed foundation than hitherto. Intense debate broke out between “maculists” (who held that Mary was subject to original sin, like everyone else) and “immaculists” (who held that she was preserved from the taint of original sin). There was also considerable discussion over whether Mary could be said to be “co-redemptrix” (that is to say, whether she was to be regarded as a figure of redemption, in a manner similar to Jesus Christ).

Returning directly to the sources of Christian theology

A central element of the humanist agenda was the return to the original sources of western European culture in classical Rome and Athens. The theological counterpart to this element was the direct return to the foundational resources of Christian theology, above all in the New Testament. This agenda proved to be of major significance, as will be seen later (see pp. 115–17). One of its most important consequences was a new appreciation of the foundational importance of Scripture as a theological resource. As interest in Scripture developed, it became increasingly clear that existing Latin translations of this source were inadequate. Supreme among these was the “Vulgate,” a Latin translation of the Bible which achieved widespread influence during the Middle Ages. As revision of the translations, especially the Vulgate, proceeded, it became clear that theological revision was inevitable. Some teachings seemed to be based on faulty translations.

The rise of humanist textual and philological techniques was to expose distressing discrepancies between the Vulgate and the texts it purported to translate – and thus to open the way to doctrinal reform as a consequence. It is for this reason that humanism is of decisive importance to the development of medieval theology: it demonstrated the unreliability of this translation of the Bible – and hence, it seemed, of the theologies based upon it. The biblical basis of scholasticism seemed to collapse, as humanism uncovered error after error in its translation. We shall explore this point further in what follows; it is unquestionably one of the most significant developments in the history of Christian theology at this time.

The critique of the Vulgate translation of Scripture

The literary and cultural program of humanism can be summarized in the slogan *ad fontes* – “back to the original sources.” The “filter” of medieval commentaries – whether on legal texts or on the Bible – was abandoned, in order for humanists to engage directly with the original texts. Applied to the Christian church, the slogan *ad fontes* meant a direct return to the title deeds of Christianity – to the patristic writers, and supremely to the Bible, studied in its original languages. This necessitated direct access to the Greek text of the New Testament.

The first printed Greek New Testament was produced by Erasmus in 1516. Erasmus’s text was not as reliable as it ought to have been: he had access to a mere four manuscripts for most of the New Testament, and only one for its final part, the Book of Revelation. As it happened, the manuscript left out five verses, which Erasmus himself had to translate into Greek from the Latin of the Vulgate. Nevertheless, it proved to be a literary milestone. For the first time, theologians had the opportunity of comparing the original Greek text of the New Testament with the later Vulgate translation into Latin.

Drawing on work carried out earlier by the Italian humanist Lorenzo Valla, Erasmus showed that the Vulgate translation of several major New Testament texts could not be justified. As a number of medieval church practices and beliefs were based upon these texts, Erasmus’s allegations were viewed with consternation by many conservative Catholics (who wanted to retain these practices and beliefs) and with equally great delight by the reformers (who wanted to eliminate them). Three classic examples of translation errors will indicate the relevance of Erasmus’s biblical scholarship:

1. Much medieval theology justified the inclusion of matrimony in the list of sacraments on the basis of a New Testament text which – at least, in the Vulgate translation – spoke of marriage being a *sacramentum* (Ephesians 5: 31–2). Erasmus pointed out that the Greek word *mysterion*, here translated as “sacrament,” simply meant “mystery.” There was no reference whatsoever to marriage being a sacrament. One

of the classic proof texts used by medieval theologians to justify the inclusion of matrimony in the list of sacraments was thus rendered virtually useless.

2. The Vulgate translated the opening words of Jesus' ministry (Matthew 4: 17) as "*do penance*, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." This translation suggested that the coming of the kingdom of heaven had a direct connection with the sacrament of penance. Erasmus, again following Valla, pointed out that the Greek should be translated as "*repent*, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." In other words, where the Vulgate seemed to refer to an outward practice (the sacrament of penance), Erasmus insisted that the reference was to an inward psychological attitude – that of "being repentant." Once more, an important justification of the sacramental system of the medieval church was challenged.

3. According to the Vulgate, the angel Gabriel greeted Mary as "the one who is full of grace" (*gratia plena*) (Luke 1: 28), thus suggesting the image of a reservoir full of grace, which could be drawn upon at time of need. But, as Erasmus pointed out, the Greek simply meant "favored one," or "one who has found favor." Mary was one who had found God's favor, not necessarily one who could bestow it on others. Once more, an important feature of medieval theology seemed to be contradicted by humanist New Testament scholarship.

These developments undermined the credibility of the Vulgate translation and opened the way to theological revision on the basis of a better understanding of the biblical text. They also demonstrated the importance of biblical scholarship in relation to theology. Theology could not be permitted to base itself upon translation mistakes! The recognition of the vitally important role of biblical scholarship to Christian theology thus dates from the second decade of the sixteenth century. It also led to the theological debates of the Reformation age, to which we shall turn in the next chapter.

Key Names, Words, and Phrases

By the end of this chapter, you will have encountered the following terms, some of which will recur during the work. Ensure that you are familiar with them! They have been capitalized as you are likely to encounter them in normal use.

ad fontes

apologetics

Byzantine

Five Ways

humanism

immaculate conception

medieval

Middle Ages

ontological argument

Renaissance

scholasticism

theories of the atonement

voluntarism

Vulgate

Questions

1. What was the language spoken by most western theologians during this period?
2. “Humanists were people who were interested in studying classical Rome.” How helpful is this definition of the term?
3. What were the major themes of scholastic theology?
4. Why was there such interest in the theology of the sacraments during the Middle Ages?
5. What is meant by the slogan *ad fontes*?

Case Studies

Case study 2.1 Arguments for the existence of God

During the Middle Ages, considerable emphasis was placed upon the rationality of the Christian faith. This was especially the case during the thirteenth century, when Christianity came into contact with Islam at various places in western Europe, including the University of Paris. Since Christianity and Islam shared little in common, debates between the two faiths were often conducted on the basis of an appeal to reason.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the question of whether God's existence could be proved was a frequent topic of debate. Few scholastic theologians thought it was possible to prove that God existed from first principles. A more general approach was to take the general Christian understanding of God, and show that this fitted in with human rationality, or with what could be observed of the natural world. In this case study, we shall consider two families of arguments for the existence of God that emerged during the Middle Ages – Anselm of Canterbury's eleventh-century argument, and the "Five Ways" of Thomas Aquinas, developed during the thirteenth century.

Anselm of Canterbury's "ontological" argument

The "ontological argument" is first set out in Anselm's work entitled the *Proslogion* (this Greek word is not easily translated: "foreword" might be an acceptable starting point), a devotional work which dates from 1079. (The term "ontological" refers to the branch of philosophy that deals with the notion of "being.") Anselm himself does not refer to his discussion as an "ontological" argument. When his contemporaries wished to refer to his approach, they dubbed it "Anselm's argument." In fact, there is really no "ontological" character to the argument, as Anselm presents it; and Anselm never actually suggested that his reflections were to be seen as an "argument" for the existence of God. The *Proslogion* is really a work of meditation, not of logical argument. In the course of this work, Anselm

reflects on how self-evident the idea of God has become to him, and what the implications of this might be.

Anselm of Canterbury (c.1033–1109). Born in Italy, Anselm migrated to Normandy in 1059, entering the famous monastery of Bec and becoming its prior in 1063 and abbot in 1078. In 1093 he was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury. He is chiefly noted for his strong defense of the intellectual foundations of Christianity, and is especially associated with the “ontological argument” for the existence of God.

In his *Proslogion*, Anselm offers a definition of God as “that than which no greater thing can be thought” (*aliquid quo maius cogitari non potest*). He argues that if this definition of God is correct, it necessarily implies the existence of God. The reason for this is as follows. If God does not exist, the idea of God remains, yet the reality of God is absent. Yet the reality of God is greater than the idea of God. Therefore, if God is “that than which no greater thing can be thought,” the idea of God must lead to accepting the reality of God, in that otherwise the mere idea of God is the greatest thing which can be thought. And this contradicts the definition of God on which the argument is based. Therefore, given the existence of the idea of God, and the acceptance of the definition of God as “that than which no greater thing can be thought,” the reality of God necessarily follows. Note that the Latin verb *cogitare* is sometimes translated as “conceive,” leading to the definition of God as “that than which no greater thing can be conceived.” Both translations are acceptable.

This is not an easy argument to follow, so it may be helpful to go over this again. God is defined as “that than which nothing greater can be conceived.” Now the idea of such a being is one thing; the reality is another. Thinking of a 100-dollar bill is quite different from having a 100-dollar bill in your hands – and much less satisfying, as well. Anselm’s point is this: the idea of something is inferior to the reality. So the idea of God as “that than which nothing greater can be conceived” contains a contradiction – because the reality of God would be superior to this idea. In other words, if this definition of God is correct, and exists in the human mind, then the corresponding reality must also exist:

This [definition of God] is indeed so true that it cannot be thought of as not being true. For it is quite possible to think of something whose non-existence cannot be thought of. This must be greater than something whose non-existence can be thought of. So if this thing (than which no greater thing can be thought) can be thought of as not existing, then,

that very thing than which a greater thing cannot be thought is not that than which a greater cannot be thought. This is a contradiction. So it is true that there exists something than which nothing greater can be thought, that it cannot be thought of as not existing. And you are this thing, O Lord our God! So truly therefore do you exist, O Lord my God, that you cannot be thought of as not existing, and with good reason; for if a human mind could think of anything greater than you, the creature would rise above the Creator and judge you; which is obviously absurd. And in truth whatever else there be beside you may be thought of as not existing. So you alone, most truly of all, and therefore most of all, have existence: because whatever else exists, does not exist as truly as you, and therefore exists to a lesser degree.

This is an important and much-discussed argument, and it is worth focusing on its central elements:

1. Note the definition of God which Anselm offers. No justification is offered for the notion of God as “that than which no greater thing can be thought.” It is taken to be self-evidently true.
2. Anselm then argues that a real entity is greater than a mere idea. This point, which is assumed to be obvious to the reader, is the second critical stage in the argument, the first being the definition of God that was offered earlier in the passage.
3. The conclusion of the argument is that since the idea of God is clearly inferior to the reality of God, it must follow that God exists. Otherwise, the definition of God which was set out is shown to be inconsistent.

This argument did not persuade one of his earliest critics, a Benedictine monk named Gaunilo, who made a response known as “A Reply on Behalf of the Fool” (the reference being to Psalm 14: 1, cited by Anselm, “The fool says in his heart that there is no God”). There is, according to Gaunilo, an obvious logical weakness in Anselm’s “argument” (although it must be stressed that Anselm does not really regard it as an argument in the first place). Imagine, Gaunilo suggests, an island, so lovely that a more perfect island cannot be conceived. By the same argument, Gaunilo suggests, that island must exist, in that the reality of the island is necessarily more perfect than the mere idea. In much the same way, we might argue that the idea of a 100-dollar bill seems, according to Anselm, to imply that we have such a

bill in our hands. The mere idea of something – whether a perfect island or God – thus does not guarantee its existence:

People say that somewhere in the ocean there is an island which, because of the difficulty (or rather the impossibility) of finding that which does not exist, some have called the “Lost Island.” And we are told that it is blessed with all manner of priceless riches and delights in abundance, far more than the Happy Isles, and, having no owner or inhabitant, it is superior in every respect in the abundance of its riches to all those other lands that are inhabited by people. Now, if someone were to tell me about this, I shall easily understand what is said, since there is nothing difficult about it. But if I am then told, as though it were a direct consequence of this: “You cannot any more doubt that this island that is more excellent than all other lands truly exists somewhere in reality than you can doubt that it is in your mind; and since it is more excellent to exist not just in your mind but in reality as well, therefore it must exist. For if it did not exist, any other land existing in reality would be more excellent than it, and so this island, already conceived by you to be more excellent than others, will not be more excellent.” I say that if anyone wanted to persuade me in this way that this island really exists beyond all doubt, I should either think that they were joking, or I should find it hard to decide which of us I ought to think of as the bigger fool: I myself, if I agreed with them, or they, if they thought that they had proved the existence of this island with any certainty, unless they had first persuaded me that its very excellence exists in my mind precisely as a thing existing truly and indubitably and not just as something unreal or doubtfully real.

The response offered by Gaunilo is widely regarded as exposing a serious weakness in Anselm’s argument. The text itself is so clear that no comment is needed. It may, however, be pointed out that Anselm is not so easily dismissed. Part of his argument is that it is an essential part of the definition of God that he is “that than which nothing greater can be conceived.” God therefore belongs to a totally different category than islands or dollar bills. It is part of the nature of God to transcend everything else. Once the believer has come to understand what the word “God” means, then God really does exist for him or her. This is the intention of Anselm’s meditation: to reflect on how the Christian understanding of the nature of God reinforces belief in his reality. The “argument” does not really have

force outside this context of faith, and Anselm never intended it to be used in this general philosophical manner.

Furthermore, Anselm argued that Gaunilo had not entirely understood him. The argument which he set out in the *Proslogion* did not involve the idea that there is a being that is, as a matter of fact, greater than any other being; rather, Anselm had argued for a being so great that a greater one could not even be conceived. The argument continues, and it remains a disputed question to this day as to whether Anselm's argument has a genuine basis.

The “Five Ways” of Thomas Aquinas

A very different approach (or, perhaps we should say, range of approaches) is offered by the great scholastic writer Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas believed that it was entirely proper to identify pointers toward the existence of God, drawn from general human experience of the world. So what kind of pointers does Aquinas identify? The basic line of thought guiding Aquinas is that the world mirrors God, as its creator – an idea which is given more formal expression in his doctrine of the “analogy of being.” Just as an artist might sign a painting to identify it as his handiwork, so God has stamped a divine “signature” upon the creation. What we observe in the world – for example, its signs of ordering – can be explained on the basis of the existence of God as its creator. God is both its first cause and its designer. God both brought the world into existence, and impressed the divine image and likeness upon it.

Thomas Aquinas (c.1225–74). Probably the most famous and influential theologian of the Middle Ages. Born in Italy, he achieved his fame through his teaching and writing at the University of Paris and other northern universities. His fame rests chiefly on his *Summa Theologiae*, composed toward the end of his life and not totally finished at the time of his death. However, he also wrote many other significant works, particularly the *Summa contra Gentiles*, which represents a major statement of the rationality of the Christian faith.

So where might we look in creation to find evidence for the existence of God? Aquinas argues that the ordering of the world is the most convincing evidence of God's existence and wisdom. This basic assumption underlies each of the “Five Ways,” although it is of particular importance in the case of the argument often referred to as the “argument from design” or the “teleological argument.” We shall consider each of these “ways” individually.

The *first way* begins from the observation that things in the world are in motion or change. The world is not static, but is dynamic. Examples of this are easy to list. Rain falls from the sky. Stones roll down valleys. The earth revolves around the sun (a fact, incidentally, unknown to Aquinas). This, the first of Aquinas's arguments, is normally referred to as the "argument from motion"; however, it is clear that the "movement" in question is actually understood in more general terms, so that the term "change" is more appropriate as a translation at points. (The Latin word *motus* can bear the meaning of both "motion" and "change.")

So how did nature come to be in motion? Why is it changing? Why isn't it static? Aquinas argues that everything which moves is moved by something else. For every motion, there is a cause. Things don't just move – they are moved. Now each cause of motion must itself have a cause. And that cause must have a cause as well. And so Aquinas argues that there is a whole series of causes of motion lying behind the world as we know it. Now, unless there is an infinite number of these causes, Aquinas argues, there must be a single cause right at the origin of the series. From this original cause of motion, all other motion is ultimately derived. This is the origin of the great chain of causality which we see reflected in the way the world behaves. From the fact that things are in motion, Aquinas thus argues for the existence of a single original cause of all this motion – and this, he concludes, is none other than God. In the passage that follows, I have translated the Latin term *motus* as "change":

The existence of God can be proved in five ways. The first and most obvious proof is the argument from change [*ex parte motus*]. It is clearly the case that some things in this world are in the process of changing. Now everything that is in the process of being changed is changed by something else. ... If, then, whatever is changing it is itself changed, this also must be changed by something else, and this in turn by something else again. But this cannot go on forever, since there would then be no first cause to this process of change, and consequently no other agent of change, because secondary things which change cannot change unless they are changed by a first cause, in the same way as a stick cannot move unless it is moved by the hand. We are therefore bound to arrive at a first cause of change which is not changed by anything, and everyone understands that this is God.

The *second way* begins from the idea of causation. In other words, Aquinas notes the existence of causes and effects in the world. One event (the effect) is explained by the influence of another (the cause). The idea of motion, which we looked at briefly above, is a good example of this cause-and-effect sequence. Using a line of reasoning similar to that used above, Aquinas thus argues that all effects may be traced back to a single original cause – which is God.

The *third way* concerns the existence of contingent beings. In other words, the world contains beings (such as human beings) which are not there as a matter of necessity. Aquinas contrasts this type of being with a necessary being (one who is there as a matter of necessity). Whilst God is a necessary being, Aquinas argues that humans are contingent beings. The fact that we are here needs explanation. Why are we here? What happened to bring us into existence? Aquinas argues that a being comes into existence because something that already exists brought it into being. In other words, our existence is caused by another being. We are the effects of a series of causation. Tracing this series back to its origin, Aquinas declares that this original cause of being can only be someone whose existence is necessary – in other words, God.

The *fourth way* begins from human values, such as truth, goodness, and nobility. Where do these values come from? What causes them? Aquinas argues that there must be something which is in itself true, good, and noble, and that this brings into being our ideas of truth, goodness, and nobility. The origin of these ideas, Aquinas suggests, is God, who is their original cause.

The *fifth and final way* is the teleological argument itself. Aquinas notes that the world shows obvious traces of intelligent design. Natural processes and objects seem to be adapted with certain definite objectives in mind. They seem to have a purpose. They seem to have been designed. But things don't design themselves; they are caused and designed by someone or something else. Arguing from this observation, Aquinas concludes that the source of this natural ordering must be conceded to be God.

It will be obvious that most of Aquinas's arguments are rather similar. Each depends on tracing a causal sequence back to its single origin, and identifying this with God. A number of criticisms of the "Five Ways" were made by Aquinas's critics during the Middle Ages, such as Duns Scotus and William of Ockham. The following are especially important:

1. Why is the idea of an infinite regression of causes impossible? For example, the argument from motion only really works if it can be shown that the sequence of cause and effect stops somewhere. There has to be, according to Aquinas, a Prime Unmoved Mover. But he fails to demonstrate this point.
2. Why do these arguments lead to belief in only one God? The argument from motion, for example, could lead to belief in a number of Prime Unmoved Movers. There seems to be no especially pressing reason for insisting that there can only be one such cause, except for the fundamental Christian insistence that, as a matter of fact, there is only one such God.
3. These arguments do not demonstrate that God continues to exist. Having caused things to happen, God might cease to exist. The continuing existence of events does not necessarily imply the continuing existence of their originator. Aquinas's arguments, Ockham suggests, might lead to a belief that God existed once upon a time – but not necessarily now. Ockham developed a somewhat complex argument, based on the idea of God continuing to sustain the universe, which attempts to get round this difficulty.

In the end, Aquinas's arguments only go some way toward suggesting that it is reasonable to believe in a creator of the world, or an intelligent being who is able to cause effects in the world. Nevertheless, a leap of faith is still required. It still remains to be shown that this creator or intelligent being is the God which Christians know, worship, and adore. Aquinas's arguments could lead to faith in the existence of a god rather like that favored by the Greek philosopher Aristotle – an Unmoved Mover, who is distant from and uninvolved in the affairs of the world.

Case study 2.2 Understandings of the atonement

The medieval period saw considerable interest in the doctrine of the work of Christ (often also referred to as “the atonement”), both in academic theology and in popular religion. Writers such as Anselm of Canterbury and Peter Abelard developed quite different approaches to the meaning of the death of Christ, Anselm emphasizing its legal significance, and Abelard its transformative subjective impact on the believer.

One theme which became especially significant in popular religion was the idea of the “harrowing of Hell.” The background to this idea is found in the New Testament itself. The New Testament and early church laid considerable emphasis upon the victory gained by Christ over sin, death, and Satan through Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection. This theme of victory, often linked liturgically with the Easter celebrations, was of major importance within the western Christian theological tradition until the Enlightenment. The theme of “Christ the victor” (*Christus Victor*) brought together a series of themes, centering on the idea of a decisive victory over forces of evil and oppression.

The image of Christ’s death as a ransom came to be of central importance to Greek patristic writers, such as Irenaeus. But what were the implications of this idea? If Christ’s death was a ransom, Origen argued, it must have been paid to someone. But to whom? It could not have been paid to God, in that God was not holding sinners to ransom. Therefore it had to be paid to the devil. Gregory the Great developed this idea still further. The devil had acquired rights over fallen humanity, which God was obliged to respect. The only means by which humanity could be released from this satanic domination and oppression was through the devil exceeding the limits of his authority, and thus being obliged to forfeit his rights. So how could this be achieved? Gregory suggests that it could come about if a sinless person were to enter the world, yet in the form of a normal sinful person. The devil would not notice until it was too late: in claiming authority over this sinless person, the devil would have overstepped the limits of his authority, and thus be obliged to abandon his rights.

Gregory suggested the image of a baited hook: Christ's humanity is the bait, and his divinity the hook. The devil, like a great sea monster, snaps at the bait – and then discovers, too late, the hook. "The bait tempts in order that the hook may wound. Our Lord therefore, when coming for the redemption of humanity, made a kind of hook of himself for the death of the devil." Other writers explored other images for the same idea – that of trapping the devil. Christ's death was like a net for catching birds, or a trap for catching mice. It was this aspect of this approach to the meaning of the Cross that caused the most disquiet subsequently. It seemed that God was guilty of deception. It was against any such idea of deception on the part of God that Anselm of Canterbury reacted – an idea to which we shall return presently.

The imagery of victory over the devil proved to have enormous popular appeal. The medieval idea of "the harrowing of hell" bears witness to its power. According to this idea, after dying upon the cross Christ descended to hell, and broke down its gates in order that the imprisoned souls might go free. The idea rested (rather tenuously, it has to be said) upon 1 Peter 3: 18–22, which makes reference to Christ "preaching to the spirits in prison." The great medieval hymn "You choirs of New Jerusalem," written by Fulbert of Chartres, expresses this theme in two of its verses, picking up the theme of Christ as the lion of Judah (Revelation 5: 5) defeating Satan, the serpent (Genesis 3: 15):

For Judah's lion bursts his chains
Crushing the serpent's head;
And cries aloud through death's domain
To wake the imprisoned dead.

Devouring depths of hell their prey
At his command restore;
His ransomed hosts pursue their way
Where Jesus goes before.

A similar idea can be found in a fourteenth-century English mystery play, which describes the "harrowing of hell" in the following manner:

And when Christ was dead, his spirit went in haste to hell. And soon he broke down the strong gates that were wrongfully barred against him. ... He bound Satan fast with eternal bonds, and so shall Satan ever remain bound until the day of doom. He took with him Adam and Eve

and others that were dear to him ... all these he led out of hell and set in paradise.

A very different approach was developed during the eleventh century by Anselm of Canterbury, who reacted against any idea of God deceiving the devil, or any idea that the devil could be said to have “rights” of any kind over fallen humanity, or that God should be under any obligation to respect such “rights.” At best, the devil might be allowed to have a *de facto* power over humanity – a power which exists as a matter of fact, even if it is an illegitimate and unjustified power. Yet this cannot be thought of as a *de jure* authority – that is, an authority firmly grounded in some legal or moral principle. “I do not see what force this has,” he comments, in dismissing the notion. Equally, Anselm is dismissive of any notion that God deceives the devil in the process of redemption. The entire trajectory of redemption is grounded in and reflects the righteousness of God.

Anselm’s emphasis falls totally upon the righteousness of God. God redeems humanity in a manner that is totally consistent with the divine quality of righteousness. Anselm’s treatise *Cur Deus homo* (“Why God became human”) is a sustained engagement with the question of the possibility of human redemption, cast in the form of a dialogue. In the course of his analysis, he demonstrates – although how successfully is a matter of dispute – both the necessity of the Incarnation, and the saving potential of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. The argument is complex, and can be summarized as follows:

1. God created humanity in a state of original righteousness, with the objective of bringing humanity to a state of eternal blessedness.
2. That state of eternal blessedness is contingent upon human obedience to God. However, through sin, humanity is unable to achieve this necessary obedience, which appears to frustrate God’s purpose in creating humanity in the first place.
3. In that it is impossible for God’s purposes to be frustrated, there must be some means by which the situation can be remedied. However, the situation can only be remedied if a satisfaction is made for sin. In other words, something has to be done, by which the offense caused by human sin can be purged.
4. However, there is no way in which humanity can provide this necessary satisfaction. It lacks the resources which are needed. On the

other hand, God possesses the resources needed to provide the required satisfaction.

5. Therefore a “God-man” would possess both the ability (as God) and the obligation (as a human being) to pay the required satisfaction. Therefore the Incarnation takes place, in order that the required satisfaction may be made, and humanity redeemed.

A number of points require comment. First, sin is conceived as an offense against God. The weight of that offense appears to be proportional to the status of the offended party. For many scholars, this suggests that Anselm has been deeply influenced by the feudal assumptions of his time, perhaps regarding God as the equivalent of the “lord of the manor.”

Second, there has been considerable debate over the origins of the idea of a “satisfaction.” It is possible that the idea may derive from the Germanic laws of the period, which stipulated that an offense had to be purged through an appropriate payment. However, most scholars believe that Anselm is appealing directly to the existing penitential system of the church. A sinner, seeking penance, was required to confess every sin. In pronouncing forgiveness, the priest would require that the penitent do something (such as go on a pilgrimage or undertake some charitable work) as a “satisfaction” – that is, a means of publicly demonstrating gratitude for forgiveness. It is possible that Anselm derived the idea from this source.

However, despite the obvious difficulties that attend Anselm’s approach, an important advance had been made. Anselm’s insistence that God is totally and utterly obliged to act according to the principles of justice throughout the redemption of humanity marks a decisive break with the dubious morality of the *Christus Victor* approach. In taking up Anselm’s approach, later writers were able to place it on a more secure foundation by grounding it in the general principles of law.

An early example of this can be found in Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae* (“The totality of theology”), which he began to write in 1265 and left unfinished at the time of his death. This is widely regarded as the greatest work of medieval theology. In this important and influential analysis, Aquinas develops the idea of “satisfaction,” as stated by Anselm, dealing with a number of objections which had been raised against it. His response to the criticism that the dignity of Christ was not sufficient to obtain God’s forgiveness of human sin is of especial interest. As the passage

is of interest and importance, we shall cite it in some detail, to allow the main points to be properly understood:

1. It seems that the passion of Christ did not effect our salvation by way of satisfaction. For it seems that to make satisfaction is the responsibility of the one who sins, as is clear from other aspects of penance, in that the one who sins is the one who must repent and confess. But Christ did not sin. As St. Peter says, "he committed no sin" (1 Peter 2: 22). He therefore did not make satisfaction through his passion.

2. Furthermore, satisfaction can never be made by means of a greater offense. But the greatest offense was perpetrated in the passion of Christ, since those who put him to death committed the most grievous of sins. For this reason, satisfaction could not be made to God through the passion of Christ.

3. Furthermore, satisfaction implies a certain equality with the fault, since it is an act of justice. But the passion of Christ does not seem to be equal to all the sins of the human race, since Christ suffered according to the flesh, not according to his divinity. As St. Peter says, "Christ has suffered in the flesh" (1 Peter 4: 1) ... Christ therefore did not make satisfaction for our sins by his passion ...

I reply that a proper satisfaction comes about when someone offers to the person offended something which gives him a delight greater than his hatred of the offense. Now Christ by suffering as a result of love and obedience offered to God something greater than what might be exacted in compensation for the whole offense of humanity; firstly, because of the greatness of the love, as a result of which he suffered; secondly, because of the worth of the life which he laid down for a satisfaction, which was the life of God and of a human being; thirdly, because of the comprehensiveness of his passion and the greatness of the sorrow which he took upon himself. ... And therefore the passion of Christ was not only sufficient but a superabundant satisfaction for the sins of the human race. As John says, "he is a propitiation for our sins, not only for ours, but also for those of the whole world" (1 John 2: 2).

In this extended passage, Aquinas addresses a number of points of importance. The following are of especial interest, and should be noted carefully:

1. Aquinas demonstrates how the satisfaction which Christ offered on the cross can be considered to be greater than the offense committed by humanity in the first place. The value of the satisfaction offered is determined by three factors: the greatness of the love of Christ; the intrinsic value of his life, in which humanity and divinity are combined; and the greatness of the burden which he bore. Anselm tended to focus only on the second of these three; Aquinas extends the analysis of Christ's satisfaction to include additional elements, reinforcing the theological foundations of the atonement in doing so.
2. Developing this point further, Aquinas stresses that the high value to be attributed to Christ's human nature is not to be understood purely in terms of the human nature which is assumed, but in the divinity of the person who assumed that nature.
3. Note Aquinas's distinctive method of arguing in the *Summa Theologiae*. Various objections or difficulties are set out; a general response is made (usually beginning with the words "I reply that ..."); and the individual points are then dealt with separately.

Peter Abelard (1079–1142). French theologian, who achieved a considerable reputation as a teacher at the University of Paris. Among his many contributions to the development of medieval theology, his most noted is his emphasis upon the subjective aspects of the atonement.

Aquinas's analysis shows the theological potential of the "satisfaction" model of atonement. Other medieval writers were, however, uneasy about Anselm's approach, for different reasons. Some felt that it failed to deal adequately with the subjective aspects of salvation, including the personal appropriation of faith. Others wondered whether the theme of the "love of God" had really been adequately explored, and wished to see a greater emphasis placed upon the manner in which the death of Christ showed the love of God. Perhaps the most important medieval statement of this emphasis can be found in the writings of Peter Abelard. It must be stressed that Abelard does not, as some of his interpreters suggest, reduce the meaning of the Cross to a demonstration of the love of God. This is one among many components of Abelard's soteriology, which includes traditional ideas concerning Christ's death as a sacrifice for human sin. It is Abelard's emphasis upon the subjective impact of the Cross that is distinctive.

For Abelard, “the purpose and cause of the incarnation was that Christ might illuminate the world by his wisdom, and excite it to love of himself.” In this, Abelard restates the Augustinian idea of Christ’s incarnation as a public demonstration of the extent of the love of God, with the intent of evoking a response of love from humanity. “The Son of God took our nature, and in it took upon himself to teach us by both word and example, even to the point of death, thus binding us to himself through love.” This insight is pressed home with considerable force, as the subjective impact of the love of God in Christ is explored further:

Love is increased by the faith which we have concerning Christ on account of the belief that God in Christ has united our human nature to himself, and that by suffering in that same nature he has demonstrated to us that supreme love ... Therefore, our redemption through the suffering of Christ is that deeper love within us which not only frees us from slavery to sin, but also secures for us the true liberty of the children of God, in order that we might do all things out of love rather than out of fear.

Abelard fails to provide an adequate theological foundation to allow us to understand precisely why Christ’s death is to be understood as a demonstration of the love of God. Nevertheless, his approach to the meaning of the death of Christ brought home the powerful subjective impact of that death, which had been somewhat ignored or downplayed by contemporary writers, such as Anselm of Canterbury.

It will therefore be clear that the medieval period witnessed considerable interest in the doctrine of the work of Christ, and made significant contributions to its development. Much the same may be said of its approach to the question of the nature and function of the sacraments, to which we now turn.

Case study 2.3 The theology of the sacraments

The first centuries of the Christian tradition were characterized by a relative lack of interest in the theology of the sacraments. During the second century, some discussions of a general sacramental nature can be found in such writings as the *Didache*, and the works of Irenaeus. It is only in the writings of Augustine that the issues, including that of the definition of a sacrament, begin to be fully addressed. Augustine laid down two general principles relating to the definition of sacraments, as follows:

1. A sacrament is a sign. “Signs, when applied to divine things, are called sacraments.”
2. The sign must bear some relation to the thing which is signified. “If sacraments did not bear some resemblance to the things of which they are the sacraments, they would not be sacraments at all.”

These definitions are, however, still imprecise and inadequate. For example, does it follow that every “sign of a sacred thing” is to be regarded as a sacrament? In practice, Augustine understands by “sacraments” a number of things that are no longer regarded as sacramental in character – for example, the creed and the Lord’s Prayer. As time developed, it became increasingly clear that the definition of a sacrament simply as “a sign of a sacred thing” was inadequate.

Hugh of St. Victor (d.1142). A theologian, of Flemish or German origin, who entered the Augustinian monastery of St. Victor in Paris around 1115. His most important work is *De sacramentis Christianae fidei* (“On the sacraments of the Christian faith”), which shows awareness of the new theological debates that were beginning to develop at this time.

It was during the earlier Middle Ages – the period of sacramental development par excellence – that further clarification took place. In this case study, we shall explore the general area of the definition of a sacrament. In the first half of the twelfth century, the Paris-based theologian Hugh of St. Victor revised the very imprecise definition offered by Augustine. In his comprehensive account of the theology of the sacraments, written in the first half of the twelfth century, Hugh of St. Victor set out a definition of a sacrament that included the need for a physical element

which bore some resemblance to the grace it signified. This had the important – and apparently unintended – consequence of excluding penance from the list of sacraments:

Not every sign of a sacred thing can properly be called a sacrament ... Anyone wanting a fuller and better definition of a sacrament can define it as follows: “a sacrament is a physical or material element set before the external senses, representing by likeness, signifying by its institution, and containing by sanctification, some invisible and spiritual grace.” This definition is recognized as being so appropriate and perfect that it turns out to be appropriate in the case of every sacrament, yet only the sacraments. For everything that has these three elements is a sacrament; and everything that lacks these three cannot be considered as a sacrament. For every sacrament ought to have a kind of likeness to the thing of which it is the sacrament, according to which it is capable of representing the same thing. It ought also to have been instituted in such a way that it is ordained to signify this thing. And finally, it ought to have been sanctified in such a way that it contains that thing, and is efficacious in conferring the same on those who are to be sanctified.

Hugh thus asserts that there are four essential elements in the understanding of the nature of a sacrament:

1. There must be a “physical or material” element involved – such as the water of baptism, the bread and wine of the eucharist, or the oil of extreme unction. (“Extreme unction” is the practice of anointing those who are terminally ill with consecrated olive oil.)
2. There must be a “kind of likeness” to the thing which is signified, so that it can represent the thing signified. Thus the eucharistic wine can be argued to have a “kind of likeness” to the blood of Christ, allowing it to represent that blood in a sacramental context.
3. There must be some form of “institution” through which it is “ordained to signify this thing.” In other words, there must be a good reason for believing that the sign in question is authorized to represent the spiritual reality to which it points. An example – indeed, the primary example – of the “authorization” in question is institution at the hands of Jesus Christ himself.
4. There must be an efficacy, by which the sacrament is capable of conferring the benefits which it signifies to those who partake in it.

The third of these points is of especial interest. In medieval theology, a careful distinction was drawn between the “sacraments of the Old Covenant” (such as circumcision) and the “sacraments of the New Covenant.” The essential distinction between them is that the sacraments of the Old Covenant merely signified spiritual realities, whereas the sacraments of the New Covenant actualized what they signified.

This point is emphasized in most thirteenth-century discussions of the nature of a sacrament. For example, Thomas Aquinas argues that a sacrament is an efficacious sign – something that both signifies and causes holiness:

Signs are given to humanity, so that they can discover the unknown by means of the known. As a result, a sacrament in the proper sense of the term is something that is the sign of some sacred thing pertaining to humanity; so that properly speaking a sacrament, as considered by us now, is to be defined as being the “sign of a holy thing which makes humanity holy.”

The thirteenth-century Franciscan writer Bonaventure made this point as follows, using a medicinal analogy:

Under the Old Law, there were ointments of a kind, but they were figurative and did not heal. The disease was lethal, but the anointings were superficial. ... Genuinely healing ointments must bring both spiritual anointing and a life-giving power; it was only Christ our Lord who did this, since ... through his death, the sacraments have the power to bring to life.

However, Hugh of St. Victor’s definition of a sacrament remained unsatisfactory. According to Hugh, the following items were “sacraments”: the Incarnation, the church, and death. Something was still missing. By this time, there was general agreement that there were seven sacraments – baptism, confirmation, the eucharist, penance, marriage, ordination, and extreme unction. But by Hugh’s definition, penance could not be a sacrament. It contained no material element. Theory and practice were thus seriously out of line.

The situation was resolved through the contribution of Peter Lombard. In his *Four Books of the Sentences*, compiled at Paris during the years 1155–8, Peter Lombard set out a definition of a sacrament which differed from that offered by Hugh of St. Victor by avoiding any reference to any physical

element (such as bread, wine, or water). Using this definition, Peter was able to set out a list of seven sacraments, which became definitive for medieval Catholic theology:

A sacrament bears a likeness to the thing of which it is a sign. “For if sacraments did not have a likeness of the things whose sacraments they are, they would not properly be called sacraments” (Augustine). ... Something can properly be called a sacrament if it is a sign of the grace of God and a form of invisible grace, so that it bears its image and exists as its cause. Sacraments were therefore instituted for the sake of sanctifying, as well as of signifying. ... Those things which were instituted for the purpose of signifying alone are nothing more than signs, and are not sacraments, as in the case of the physical sacrifices and ceremonial observances of the Old Law, which were never able to make those who offered them righteous. ... Now let us consider the sacraments of the New Law, which are baptism, confirmation, the bread of blessing (that is, the eucharist), penance, extreme unction, ordination, and marriage. Some of these, such as baptism, provide a remedy against sin and confer the assistance of grace; others, such as marriage, are only a remedy; and others, such as the eucharist and ordination, strengthen us with grace and power.

Note the following points:

1. A sacrament is defined as “a sign of the grace of God and a form of invisible grace, so that it bears its image and exists as its cause.” Compare this with Hugh’s definition of a sacrament as “a physical or material element set before the external senses, representing by likeness, signifying by its institution, and containing by sanctification, some invisible and spiritual grace.” Hugh begins by insisting on the need for “a physical or material element”; Peter makes no reference of any kind to such an element.
2. Note the list of seven sacraments provided by Peter: “baptism, confirmation, the bread of blessing (that is, the eucharist), penance, extreme unction, ordination, and marriage.” This list would become normative in subsequent medieval Christian thought and practice.

Case study 2.4 The interpretation of the Bible

The question of how the Bible is to be interpreted has always been of theological importance, and was discussed at some length during the medieval period, particularly as the reading of the Bible played such an important role in monastic spirituality. It was during this era of Christian thought that the interpretive scheme usually known as the “Fourfold Sense of Scripture” received its final form. In view of the importance of this method, and its impact on the theology of the period, we shall consider it in a little detail.

It will be helpful if we begin by exploring the background to the development of this scheme in the patristic period. A major influence at this time, especially within the Alexandrian school, was the lengthening shadow of the Jewish writer Philo of Alexandria (c.30 BC–c.AD 45). Philo argued that it was necessary to look beneath the surface meaning of Scripture to discern a deeper meaning which lay beneath the surface of the text. In addition to the “literal” meaning of the text, there was a deeper “spiritual” meaning, which could be uncovered by treating the passages in question as allegories, pointing to these deeper truths.

These ideas were taken up by a group of theologians based in Alexandria, including Origen. The scope of the allegorical method can be seen from Origen’s interpretation of key Old Testament images. Joshua’s conquest of the Promised Land, interpreted allegorically, referred to Christ’s conquest of sin upon the Cross, just as the sacrificial legislation in Leviticus pointed ahead to the spiritual sacrifices of Christians. It might at first sight seem that this represents a degeneration into *eisegesis*, in which the interpreter simply reads any meaning he or she likes into the text of Scripture. However, as the writings of Didymus the Blind make clear, this need not be the case. It seems that a consensus developed about the images and texts of the Old Testament which were to be interpreted allegorically. For example, Jerusalem regularly came to be seen as an allegory of the church.

In contrast, the Antiochene school placed an emphasis upon the interpretation of Scripture in the light of its historical context. This school, especially associated with writers such as Diodore of Tarsus, John

Chrysostom, and Theodore of Mopsuestia, gave an emphasis to the historical location of Old Testament prophecies, which is quite absent from the writings of Origen and other representatives of the Alexandrian tradition. Thus Theodore, in dealing with Old Testament prophecy, stresses that the prophetic message was relevant to those to whom it was directly addressed, as well as having a developed meaning for a Christian readership. Every prophetic oracle is to be interpreted as having a single consistent historical or literal meaning. In consequence, Theodore tended to interpret relatively few Old Testament passages as referring directly to Christ, whereas the Alexandrian school regarded Christ as the hidden content of many Old Testament passages, both prophetic and historical.

In the western church a slightly distinct approach can be seen to develop, which would eventually find full expression in the *Quadrigena*. This Latin term, which really means “a four-horse chariot,” sees the four senses of Scripture as the powerhouse of the church’s interpretation of the Bible. The roots of this idea lie in the patristic period. In many of his writings, Ambrose of Milan (c.337–97) developed a threefold understanding of the senses of Scripture: in addition to the natural sense, the interpreter may discern a moral and rational or theological sense. Augustine chose to follow this approach, and instead argued for a twofold sense: a literal – fleshly – historical approach and an allegorical – mystical – spiritual sense, although Augustine allows that some passages can possess both senses: “The sayings of the prophets are found to have a threefold meaning, in that some have in mind the earthly Jerusalem, others the heavenly city, and others refer to both.” To understand the Old Testament at a purely historical level is unacceptable; the key to its understanding lies in its correct interpretation. Among the major lines of “spiritual” interpretation, the following should be noted: Adam represents Christ; Eve represents the church; Noah’s ark represents the Cross; the door of Noah’s ark represents Christ’s pierced side; the city of Jerusalem represents the heavenly Jerusalem.

By the use of such lines of analysis, Augustine is able to stress the unity of both Old and New Testaments. They bear witness to the same faith, even if its modes of expression may be different. Augustine expresses this idea in a text which has become of major importance to biblical interpretation, especially as it bears on the relation between Old and New Testaments: “The New Testament is hidden in the Old; the Old is made accessible by the New” (*In Vetere Novum latet et in Novo Vetus patet*).

This distinction between the literal or historical sense of Scripture on the one hand, and a deeper spiritual or allegorical meaning on the other, came to be generally accepted within the church during the early Middle Ages. The standard method of biblical interpretation used during the Middle Ages is usually known as the *Quadrigena*, or the “fourfold sense of Scripture.” The origins of this method lie specifically in the distinction between the literal and spiritual senses. Scripture possesses four different senses. In addition to the literal sense, three non-literal senses can be distinguished: the allegorical, defining what Christians are to believe; the tropological or moral, defining what Christians are to do; and the anagogical, defining what Christians are to hope for. The four senses of Scripture were thus the following:

1. The *literal sense* of Scripture, in which the text could be taken at face value, referring to some historical event.
2. The *allegorical sense*, which interpreted certain passages of Scripture to produce statements of doctrine. Those passages tended either to be obscure, or to have a literal meaning that was unacceptable, for theological reasons, to their readers.
3. The *tropological or moral sense*, which interpreted such passages to produce ethical guidance for Christian conduct.
4. The *anagogical sense*, which interprets passages to indicate the grounds of Christian hope, pointing toward the future fulfillment of the divine promises in the New Jerusalem.

This scheme was often summed up by a Latin mnemonic, found in the writings of Augustine of Hippo and many other writers of the early Middle Ages:

Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria
Moralis quid agas, quid speres anagogia.

A rough translation of this is: “The literal [sense] teaches about deeds; the allegorical [sense] what to believe; the moral [sense] what to do; the anagogical [sense] what to hope for.”

A potential weakness was avoided by insisting that nothing should be believed on the basis of a non-literal sense of Scripture, unless it could first be established on the basis of the literal sense. This insistence on the priority of the literal sense of Scripture may be seen as an implied criticism of the allegorical approach adopted by Origen, which virtually allowed

interpreters of Scripture to read whatever “spiritual” interpretations they liked into any passage.

So how was this method of biblical interpretation applied? An example will help understand the scope of the *Quadrigena*, as well as indicate its potential limitations. In the course of his exposition of Song of Songs 1: 16, written in Latin in the first half of the twelfth century, Bernard of Clairvaux provides an allegorical interpretation of the phrase “the beams of our houses are of cedar, and our panels are of cypress”:

By “houses” we are to understand the great mass of the Christian people, who are bound together with those who possess power and dignity, rulers of the church and the state, as “beams.” These hold them together by wise and firm laws; otherwise, if each of them were to operate in any way that they pleased, the walls would bend and collapse, and the whole house would fall in ruins. By the “panels,” which are firmly attached to the beams and which adorn the house in a royal manner, we are to understand the kindly and ordered lives of a properly instructed clergy, and the proper administration of the rites of the church. Yet how can the clergy carry out their work, or the church discharge her duties, unless the princes, like strong and solid beams, sustain them through their goodwill and munificence, and protect them through their power?

This extract is an excellent illustration of the way in which doctrinal or spiritual meaning was “read into” otherwise unpromising passages at this time. Note especially the way in which developed meanings, often with virtually no connection with the text itself, were drawn out of the passage in question. The advantages and disadvantages of the method will be immediately obvious. On the positive side, significant meanings can be attached to otherwise apparently unimportant passages of the Bible; on the negative side, the meanings in question often rest on somewhat flimsy or even arbitrary foundations.

A further development of major importance to biblical interpretation in the later Middle Ages was the rise of Renaissance humanism, with its distinctive emphasis on returning to the original sources in the original languages. We shall explore this further in the following case study.

Case study 2.5 Renaissance humanism and the Bible

In our overview of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, we drew attention to the importance of humanism in relation to biblical scholarship in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, and touched on the importance of translation alterations to theological revisionism. So important is this theme for historical theology that a much more detailed examination of the matter is required. The present case study aims to set out the implications of the methods and goals associated with the Renaissance for Christian theology at the time. We begin by exploring what a typical medieval theologian would have understood by the phrase “the Bible.”

When medieval theologians refer to “Scripture,” they almost invariably mean the Latin translation of the Bible widely referred to as the *textus vulgatus* (literally, the “common text”) drawn up by the great patristic biblical scholar Jerome in the late fourth and early fifth century. Although the term “Vulgate” did not come into general use in the sixteenth century, it is perfectly acceptable to use this term to refer to the specific Latin translation of the Bible prepared by Jerome. This text was passed down to the Middle Ages in a number of forms, with considerable variations between them. For example, Theodulf and Alcuin, noted scholars of the Dark Ages, used quite different versions of the Vulgate text. A new period of intellectual activity opened up in the eleventh century as the Dark Ages lifted. It was clear that a standard version of this text was required to service the new interest in theology which developed as part of this intellectual renaissance. If theologians were to base their theology upon different versions of the Vulgate, an equally great, if not greater, variation in their conclusions would be the inevitable result.

This need for standardization was met by what appears to have been a joint speculative venture by some Paris theologians and stationers in 1226, resulting in the “Paris version” of the Vulgate text. By then, Paris was recognized as the leading center of theology in Europe, with the inevitable result that – despite its many obvious imperfections – the “Paris version” of the Vulgate became established as normative. This version, it must be emphasized, was not commissioned or sponsored by any ecclesiastical

figure: it appears to have been a purely commercial venture. History, however, concerns the fate of accidents, and it is necessary to note that medieval theologians, attempting to base their theology upon Scripture, were obliged to equate Scripture with a rather bad commercial edition of an already faulty Latin translation of the Bible. The rise of humanist textual and philological techniques would expose the distressing discrepancies between the Vulgate and the texts it purported to translate – and thus open the way to doctrinal reformation as a consequence.

So what was the significance of humanism in relation to the many theological questions concerning the authority, interpretation, and application of the Bible? The main elements of the humanist contribution to this important question are summarized as follows:

1. The great humanist emphasis upon the need to return to the original sources (*ad fontes*) of theology established the priority of Scripture over its commentators, particularly those of the Middle Ages. The text of Scripture was to be approached directly, rather than through a complicated system of glosses and commentaries.
2. Scripture was to be read directly in its original languages, rather than in Latin translation. Thus the Old Testament was to be studied in Hebrew (except for those few sections written in Aramaic), and the New Testament was to be read in Greek. The growing humanist interest in the Greek language (which many humanists held to be supreme in its capacity to mediate philosophical concepts) further consolidated the importance attached to the New Testament documents. The late Renaissance scholarly ideal was to be *trium linguarum gnarus*, “expert in three languages [Hebrew, Greek, and Latin].” Trilingual colleges were established at Alcalá in Spain, at Paris, and at Wittenberg. The new interest in, and availability of, Scripture in its original language soon brought to light a number of serious translation mistakes in the Vulgate, some of considerable importance.
3. The humanist movement made available two essential tools required for the new method of study of the Bible. First, it made available the printed text of Scripture in its original languages, for example, Erasmus’s *Novum Instrumentum omne* of 1516, which allowed scholars direct access to the printed text of the Greek New Testament; Jacques Lefèvre d’Etaples provided the Hebrew text of a group of important Psalms in 1509. Second, it made available manuals of classical

languages, allowing scholars to learn languages which they otherwise could not have acquired. Reuchlin's Hebrew primer, *De rudimentis hebraicis* ("On the basics of Hebrew," 1506), is an excellent example of this type of material. Greek primers were more common: the Aldine press produced an edition of Lascaris's Greek grammar in 1495; Erasmus's translation of the famous Greek grammar of Theodore of Gaza appeared in 1516; and Melanchthon produced a masterly Greek primer in 1518.

4. The humanist movement developed textual techniques capable of establishing accurately the best text of Scripture. These techniques had been used, for example, by Lorenzo Valla to demonstrate the inauthenticity of the famous Donation of Constantine. It was now possible to eliminate many of the textual errors which had crept into the Parisian edition of the Vulgate. Erasmus shocked his contemporaries by excluding a significant part of one verse of the Bible (1 John 5: 7), which he could not find in any Greek manuscript, as a later addition. The Vulgate version reads as follows: "For there are three that testify [in heaven: the Father, the Words and the Holy Spirit, and these three are one. And there are three that testify on earth]: the Spirit, the water and the blood." The bracketed section of the verse, omitted by Erasmus, was certainly there in the Vulgate – but not in the Greek texts which it purported to translate. As this text had become an important proof-text for the doctrine of the Trinity, many were outraged at his action. Theological conservatism here often triumphed over scholarly progress: even the famous King James Version (also known as the Authorized Version) of 1611, for example, included the spurious verse, despite its absence in the key Greek manuscripts.

5. The humanists tended to regard ancient texts as mediating an experience, which could be recaptured through appropriate literary methods. Included in the theme *ad fontes* is the notion of recapturing the experience mediated by the text. In the case of the New Testament, the experience in question was that of the presence and power of the risen Christ. Scripture was thus read with a sense of anticipation – it was believed that the vitality and excitement of the **apostolic era** could be regained in the sixteenth century by reading and studying Scripture in the right manner.

6. In his *Enchiridion*, which became enormously influential in 1515, Erasmus argued that a biblically literate laity held the key to the renewal of the church. Both clergy and church were marginalized: the lay reader of Scripture had therein a more than adequate guide to the essentials of Christian belief and especially practice. These views, which achieved wide circulation among the lay intelligentsia of Europe, unquestionably prepared the way for the scriptural reforming program of Luther and Zwingli in the period 1519–25.

Period of the Christian church, regarded as definitive by many, bounded by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (c.AD 35) and the death of the last apostle (c.AD 90?).

In what follows, we shall look at two key passages in which humanist scholars detected translation errors, and consider the theological implications of the translation changes which were introduced through humanist scholarship.

Matthew 4: 17

This verse describes the beginning of the ministry of Jesus, and the basic content of his preaching at this stage. The gospel of Matthew was widely used in the Middle Ages as a source for Christian teaching in parish sermons, with the result that this verse appears to have had considerable impact on the popular understanding of what Christianity was all about. The Latin of the Vulgate text reads as follows:

Exinde coepit Iesus praedicare et dicere paenitentiam agite
adpropinquavit enim regnum caelorum.

A literal English translation of this Latin text is: “Then Jesus began to preach and say: ‘do penance [*paenitentiam agite*], for the kingdom of heaven has drawn near.’ ” The natural way of reading this would be to assume that Jesus was directing those who wished to respond to his preaching of the coming of the kingdom by “doing penance” – that is, by making use of the penitential system of the church. There is a clearly implied link between the preaching of Jesus and the institution of the church. The Greek original, however, does not bear this meaning. The most natural translation of the Greek text of Matthew’s gospel at this point would be “repent,” not “do penance.” In other words, the Greek implies a personal transformation of the individual, with no implied connection with the

institution or sacraments of the church. The translation change thus had considerable theological implications.

Luke 1: 28

This text describes what is generally known as “the annunciation” – that is, the declaration by Gabriel to Mary that she is to bear a child. The Latin of the Vulgate texts reads as follows:

Et ingressus angelus ad eam dixit: ave gratia plena Dominus tecum
benedicta tu in mulieribus.

A rough translation of this is: “And the angel went in, and said to her: ‘Hail, one that is full of grace [*ave gratia plena*] the Lord is with you, blessed are you among women.’ ” The implications of this greeting were considerable, in that the clear implication is that Mary is to be regarded as a person who is “full of grace.” In medieval theology, grace was characteristically thought of as a divine or quasi-divine substance, rather than a gracious attitude on the part of God. This passage would therefore have been understood to imply that Mary was a vessel containing grace, and thus further to imply that access could be had to this grace by those who needed it in times of distress. These themes certainly became an important aspect of late medieval Marian spirituality. However, humanist scholars (such as Erasmus) argued that the Greek original of the gospel text could not be translated in this way. The natural interpretation of the text would be to refer to Mary as “one who has found favor” (with God), an idea that could be expressed in the Latin term *gratificata* rather than *gratia plena*. The implications of this translation alteration for both theology and spirituality were thus potentially considerable.

Case study 2.6 Augustinianism and Pelagianism in late medieval theology

The late medieval period saw some fascinating theological developments taking place. These are often interpreted (especially in older textbooks) in terms of a confrontation between “nominalism” and “Augustinianism” within the scholastic theology of the later Middle Ages. In recent years, however, considerable progress has been made in understanding the nature of late medieval scholasticism, leading to a rewriting of the intellectual history of the early Reformation. In what follows, we shall attempt to present an up-to-date account of trends in late medieval scholasticism, and assess their significance.

An earlier generation of scholars, writing in the period 1920–65, regarded “nominalism” as a religious school of thought which captured most northern European university faculties of theology in the later Middle Ages. It proved remarkably difficult, however, to identify the exact features of this theology. Some “nominalist” theologians (such as William of Ockham and Gabriel Biel) seemed to be very optimistic about human abilities, suggesting that it was possible for a human being to do everything that was necessary to enter into a relationship with God. Other “nominalist” theologians (such as Gregory of Rimini and Hugolino of Orvieto) appeared to be profoundly pessimistic about those same abilities, suggesting that without the grace of God, humanity was totally unable to enter into such a relationship. In desperation, scholars began to speak of “nominalistic diversity.” Eventually, however, the real solution to the problem emerged: there were actually two different schools of thought, the sole common feature of which was antirealism. Both schools adopted a nominalist position in matters of logic and the theory of knowledge – but their theological positions differed radically.

The term *via moderna* is now becoming generally accepted as the best way of referring to the movement once known as “nominalism,” which includes among its representatives such leading fourteenth- and fifteenth-century thinkers as William of Ockham, Pierre d’Ailly, Robert Holcot, and Gabriel Biel. During the fifteenth century, the *via moderna* began to make significant inroads into many northern European universities – for example,

at Paris, Heidelberg, and Erfurt. In addition to its philosophical nominalism, the movement adopted a doctrine of justification which many of its critics branded “Pelagian.” In view of the importance of this form of scholasticism to Luther’s theological breakthrough, we shall explain its understanding of justification in some detail.

The central feature of the soteriology, or doctrine of salvation, of the *via moderna* is a covenant between God and humanity. The later Middle Ages saw the development of political and economic theories based upon the concept of a covenant (for example, between a king and his people), and the theologians of the *via moderna* were quick to realize the theological potential of this idea. Just as a political covenant between a king and his people defined the obligations of king to people, and people to king, so a religious covenant between God and his people defined God’s obligations to his people, and their obligation to God. This covenant was not negotiated, of course, but was unilaterally imposed by God. The theologians of the *via moderna* were able to develop this theme – already familiar to readers of the Old Testament – using ideas borrowed from their own political and economic world.

According to these theologians, the covenant between God and human beings established the conditions necessary for justification. God has ordained to accept an individual, on condition that this individual first fulfills certain demands. These demands were summarized using the Latin tag *facere quod in se est*, literally “doing what lies within you,” or “doing your best.” When individuals met this precondition, God was obliged, by the terms of the covenant, to accept them. A Latin maxim was often used to express this point: *facienti quod in se est Deus non denegat gratiam*, “God will not deny grace to those who do what lies within them.” The noted late medieval theologian Gabriel Biel, who is known to have influenced Luther through his writings, explained that “doing your best” meant rejecting evil and trying to do good.

At this point, the parallels between the theology of the *via moderna* and Pelagius become obvious. Both assert that men and women are accepted on the basis of their own efforts and achievements. Both assert that human works place God under an obligation to reward them. It would seem that the writers of the *via moderna* are simply reproducing the ideas of Pelagius, using a more sophisticated covenantal framework. At this point, however, the theologians of the *via moderna* drew upon contemporary economic

theory to argue that they were doing nothing of the sort. Their use of late medieval economic theory is fascinating, in that it illustrates the extent to which medieval theologians were prepared to exploit ideas drawn from their social context. We shall consider their argument in some detail.

The classic example invariably cited by these theologians to illustrate the relation between good works and justification is the king and the small lead coin. Most medieval coinage systems used gold and silver coins. This had the advantage of guaranteeing the value of the coins, even if it also encouraged the practice of “clipping” precious metal from the coins’ sides. The introduction of milled edges to coins represented an attempt to prevent removal of gold or silver in this way. Occasionally, however, kings found themselves in a financial crisis, through war for example. A standard way of meeting this was to recall gold and silver coins, and melt them down. The gold and silver thus retrieved could be used to finance a war.

In the meantime, however, currency of some sort was still required. To meet this need, small leaden coins were issued, which bore the same face value as the gold and silver coins. Although their inherent value was negligible, their ascribed or imposed value was considerable. The king would promise to replace the lead coins with their gold or silver equivalents once the financial crisis was past. The value of the lead coins thus resided in the king’s promise to redeem them at their full ascribed value at a later date. The value of a gold coin derives from the gold – but the value of a lead coin derives from the royal covenant to treat that coin as if it were gold. A similar situation, of course, exists in most modern economies. For example, paper money is of negligible inherent value. Its value derives from the promise of the issuing bank to honor its notes to their full face value.

The theologians of the *via moderna* used this economic analogy to counter the charge of Pelagianism. To the suggestion that they were exaggerating the value of human works (in that they seemed to be making them capable of meriting salvation), they replied that they were doing nothing of the sort. Human works were like lead coins, they argued – of little inherent value. But God had ordained, through the covenant, to treat them as if they were of much greater value, in just the same way as a king could treat a lead coin as if it were gold. Pelagius, they conceded, certainly treated human works as if they were gold, capable of purchasing salvation. But they were arguing that human works were like lead: the only reason they were of any value was that God had graciously undertaken to treat

them as if they were much more valuable. The theological exploitation of the difference between the inherent and imposed value of coins thus served to get the theologians of the *via moderna* out of a potentially awkward situation, even if it would not satisfy their more severe critics, such as Martin Luther.

It is this “covenantal” understanding of justification that underlies Martin Luther’s theological breakthrough, to which we shall return in a later case study. Our attention now turns to a trend within late medieval scholastic theology which re-embraced the ideas of Augustine, in deliberate opposition to the *via moderna* – the movement which is now generally known as the *schola Augustiniana moderna*, the “modern Augustinian school.”

It is known that the University of Oxford was one of the strongholds of the *via moderna* in the early fourteenth century. A group of thinkers, largely based in Merton College, developed the ideas on justification noted above, characteristic of the *via moderna*. And it was at Oxford that the first backlash against this movement occurred. The individual responsible for this backlash was Thomas Bradwardine, later to become Archbishop of Canterbury, who wrote a furious attack on the ideas of the Oxford representatives of the *via moderna*, entitled *De causa Dei contra Pelagium*, “The case of God against Pelagius.” In this book, he charged his Merton colleagues with being “modern Pelagians,” and developed a theory of justification which represents a return to the views of Augustine, as they are found in the anti-Pelagian writings.

Important though Oxford was as a theological center, the Hundred Years War led to it becoming increasingly isolated from the continent of Europe. Although Bradwardine’s ideas would be developed in England by John Wycliffe, they were taken up on the mainland of Europe by Gregory of Rimini at the University of Paris. Gregory had one particularly significant advantage over Bradwardine: he was a member of a religious order (the Order of the Hermits of St. Augustine, generally referred to as the “Augustinian Order”). And just as the Dominicans propagated the views of Thomas Aquinas, and the Franciscans those of Duns Scotus, so the Augustinians would promote the ideas of Gregory of Rimini. It is this transmission of an Augustinian tradition, deriving from Gregory of Rimini, within the Augustinian Order which is increasingly referred to as the

“modern Augustinian school,” *schola Augustiniana moderna*. Its general features can be described as follows.

First, Gregory adopted a nominalist view on the question of universals. Like many thinkers of his time, he had little time for the realism of Thomas Aquinas or Duns Scotus. In this respect, he has much in common with thinkers of the *via moderna*, such as Robert Holcot or Gabriel Biel. Second, Gregory developed a soteriology, or doctrine of salvation, which reflects the influence of Augustine. We find an emphasis upon the need for grace, upon the fallenness and sinfulness of humanity, upon the divine initiative in justification, and upon divine predestination. Salvation is understood to be totally a work of God, from its beginning to its end. Where the theologians of the *via moderna* held that humans could initiate their justification by “doing their best,” Gregory insisted that only God could initiate justification. The *via moderna* held that most (but not all) necessary soteriological resources were located within human nature. The merits of Christ are an example of a resource lying outside humanity; the ability to desist from sin and turn to righteousness is, for a writer such as Biel, an example of a vital soteriological resource located within humanity.

In marked contrast, Gregory of Rimini argued that these resources were located exclusively outside human nature. Even the ability to desist from sin and turn to righteousness arose through the action of God, not a human action. It is obvious that these represent two totally different ways of understanding the human and divine roles in justification.

Although this academic Augustinianism was particularly associated with the Augustinian Order, not every Augustinian monastery or university school seems to have adopted its ideas. Nevertheless, it seems that a school of thought that was strongly Augustinian in cast was in existence in the late Middle Ages on the eve of the Reformation. In many ways, the Wittenberg reformers, with their particular emphasis upon the anti-Pelagian writings of Augustine, may be regarded as having rediscovered and revitalized this tradition. As the views of some leading reformers, such as Luther or Calvin, seem to parallel those of this academic Augustinianism, the question has often been asked: were the reformers influenced, directly or indirectly, by this Augustinian tradition? While this question is too complex to be discussed in detail here, it may be noted that there are excellent reasons for suggesting that both may have been influenced by currents of thought in

late medieval scholasticism (although the extent and nature of that influence is a matter of some debate).

We may illustrate this point by considering the case of John Calvin (1509–64). Calvin began his academic career at the University of Paris in the 1520s. As study after study has made clear, the University of Paris – and especially Calvin’s college, the Collège de Montaigu – was a stronghold of the *via moderna*. During his four or five years studying at the faculty of arts at Paris, Calvin could not have avoided encountering the leading ideas of this movement. One especially obvious point of affinity between Calvin and late medieval theology concerns voluntarism – the doctrine that the ultimate grounds of merit lie in the will of God, not in the intrinsic goodness of an action. To explore this doctrine, let us consider a human moral action – for example, giving money to a charity. What is the meritorious value of this action? What is it worth in the sight of God? The relation between the moral (i.e., the human) and the meritorious (i.e., the divine) value of actions was of major concern to late medieval theologians. Two distinct approaches developed: the intellectualist and the voluntarist.

The intellectualist approach argued that the divine intellect recognized the inherent moral value of an act, and rewarded it accordingly. There was a direct connection between the moral and the meritorious. The voluntarist approach rejected this, arguing that it made God dependent upon his creatures. The meritorious value of a human action could not be allowed to be predetermined; God had to be free to choose whatever value he liked. There was thus no necessary connection between the moral and the meritorious. So the meritorious value of a human action does not rest upon its inherent value, but is grounded solely in the worth which God chooses to impose upon it. This principle is summarized in the maxim of Duns Scotus (usually, though not entirely correctly, regarded as the originator of the trend toward voluntarism in later medieval thought), to the effect that the value of an offering is determined solely by the divine will, rather than by its inherent goodness. The divine will choose to impose whatever value it cared upon human actions, preserving the freedom of God. In the later Middle Ages, the voluntarist position gained increasing sympathy, especially within radical Augustinian circles. Most theologians of the *via moderna* and *schola Augustiniana moderna* adopted it.

In the *Institutes*, Calvin adopts exactly this voluntarist position in relation to the merit of Christ. Although this is implicit in earlier editions of the

work, it is only explicitly stated in the 1559 edition, in the aftermath of Calvin's correspondence with Laelius Socinus on the subject. In 1555, Calvin responded to questions raised by Socinus concerning the merit of Christ and the assurance of faith, and appears to have incorporated these replies directly into the text of the 1559 edition of the *Institutes*.

The death of Christ on the cross is a central focus of Christian thought and worship. But why should the death of Christ have such enormous importance? What justification can be given for its centrality? Why is the death of Christ – rather than of any other individual – declared to be of unique significance? In the course of this correspondence, Calvin considers this question, known technically as the *ratio meriti Christi* (the basis of the merit of Christ). Why is Christ's death on the cross sufficient to purchase the redemption of humanity? Is it something intrinsic to the person of Christ, as Luther had argued? For Luther, the divinity of Christ was adequate grounds for declaring that his death was uniquely important. Or was it that God chose to accept his death as sufficient to merit the redemption of humanity? Was this value inherent within Christ's death, or was it imposed upon it by God?

Calvin makes clear his view that the basis of Christ's merit is not located in Christ's offering of himself (which would correspond to an intellectualist approach to the *ratio meriti Christi*), but in the divine decision to accept such an offering as of sufficient merit for the redemption of mankind (which corresponds to the voluntarist approach). For Calvin, "apart from God's good pleasure, Christ could not merit anything." The continuity between Calvin and the late medieval voluntarist tradition will be evident.

In the past, this similarity between Calvin and Scotus has been taken to imply the direct influence of Scotus on Calvin. In fact, however, Calvin's continuity appears to be with the late medieval voluntarist tradition, deriving from William of Ockham and Gregory of Rimini, in relation to which Scotus marks a point of transition. No reason may be given for the meritorious nature of Christ's sacrifice, save that God benevolently ordained to accept it as such. The continuity of Calvin with this later tradition is evident.

This observation provides a convenient transition to the next part of this work, which deals with the period of the Reformation itself.

3

The Reformation and Post-Reformation Periods, 1500–1750

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Christian theology underwent major development and transformation during the Middle Ages. At its height, the period produced some highly significant contributions to Christian theology. Yet many scholars of this fascinating era detect a sense of tiredness, a loss of intellectual energy, during the fifteenth century. By this time, the Renaissance had consolidated its hold on many centers of theological education and scholarship, creating pressure for new theological paradigms and expressions. The scene was set for a major shift in the methods, concepts, and vocabulary of Christian theology in western Europe. Historically, this paradigm shift began to take place in the early sixteenth century. The movement in question was complex, yet is often referred to in a single phrase – the Reformation.

A major new period in western Christian theology opened in the sixteenth century. The styles of Christian theology associated with the medieval period gave way to new paradigms. The most significant development was the period of reformation within the western European church, as a result of

movements that sought to return the western church to more biblical foundations in relation to its belief system, morality, and structures. As Christianity was virtually landlocked within Europe at this stage in its history, these developments were destined to have a major impact subsequently on the development of Christian theology globally through its expansion into new regions of the world.

The Reformation initially led to the formation of a cluster of Protestant churches in Europe, subsequently to the renewal and reformation of the Catholic church in the same region, and inevitably to conflict between Protestants and Catholics on the one hand, and between the various Protestant churches on the other. For historians, the importance of this period lies in the social and political ramifications of the Reformations, the birth of confessional Europe, the political and intellectual consolidation of both the Protestant and Catholic Reformations, the so-called radical Reformation, the intensification of religious, social, and sexual discipline on the part of secular and ecclesiastical authorities, and the origins of the Wars of Religion. Yet the period is of pivotal importance to the development of modern Christian theology, as will become clear in this chapter. A particularly significant development which took place during the later part of this period is the expansion of western Christianity from its European context. The arrival of English Puritan communities in Massachusetts Bay and Spanish and Portuguese missionaries in South America opened the way to a further period of expansion of Christianity, which would become of increasing theological significance during the modern period.

Reformation – or Reformations?

The term “Reformation” is traditionally used by historians and theologians to refer to the western European movement, centering upon individuals such as Martin Luther, Huldrych Zwingli, and John Calvin, concerned with the moral, theological, and institutional reform of the Christian church in that region. More recent scholarship, noting the emergence of reforming movements throughout Europe at this time, has rightly suggested that we should speak of “reformations.” The use of the plural form ensures that the significance of the mainline Protestant Reformation is safeguarded, while at the same time recognizing that this same era gave birth to the Catholic Reformation, the radical Reformation, and the movement now generally known as the “Second Reformation.”

Initially, up to about 1525, the Reformation may be regarded as revolving around Martin Luther and the University of Wittenberg, in modern-day northeastern Germany. However, the movement also gained strength, independently at first, in the Swiss city of Zurich in the early 1520s. Through a number of complex developments, the Zurich Reformation gradually underwent a series of political and theological modifications, eventually coming to be associated primarily with the city of Geneva (now part of modern-day Switzerland, although then an independent city-state) and John Calvin.

The Reformation movement was complex and heterogeneous, and its agenda went far beyond the reform of church teachings and practices. It addressed fundamental social, political, and economic issues, too complex to be discussed in any detail in this volume. The agenda of the Reformation varied from one country to another, with the theological issues that played major roles in one country (for example, Germany) often having relatively little impact elsewhere (for example, in England).

In response to the Protestant Reformation, the Catholic church moved to put its own house in order. Prevented from calling a reforming council at an earlier date due to political instability in Europe resulting from tensions between France and Germany, the pope of the day (Paul III) was eventually able to convene the Council of Trent in 1545. This set itself the task of

clarifying Catholic thought and practice and defending them against its evangelical opponents.

The Reformation itself was a western European phenomenon, concentrated especially in the central and northern parts of this region, although Calvinism penetrated as far east as Hungary. However, the emigration of large numbers of individuals to North America, which becomes increasingly significant from 1600 onward, led to post-Reformation Protestant and Catholic theologies being exported to that region. Harvard College is an example of an early center of theological education in New England. The Society of Jesus also undertook extensive missionary operations in the Far East, including India, China, and Japan. Christian theology gradually began to expand beyond its western European base and become a global phenomenon – a development which received final consolidation in the modern period, to which we shall turn shortly. Our attention now turns to a consideration of the terminology linked with the Reformation and post-Reformation periods.

A Clarification of Terms

Precisely because the movement that is called “the Reformation” is so complex, it is used in a number of different senses. This point is sometimes emphasized by using the plural form “reformations,” which draws attention to the undisputable historical fact that there were a number of reforming movements in western Europe at this time, often with different geographical locations and religious agenda. Six meanings of the term are encountered in the literature: the German Reformation, which gave rise to Lutheranism; the Swiss Reformation, which gave birth to the Reformed version of Christianity often referred to as “Calvinism”; the “radical Reformation,” often still referred to as “Anabaptism”; the English Reformation, which gave rise to the distinctive form of Christianity often known as “Anglicanism”; the “Catholic Reformation” (sometimes referred to as the “Counter-Reformation”); and the “Second Reformation” within Protestantism. In its broadest sense, the term “Reformation” is used to refer to all these movements.

The term “Protestant” requires comment. It derives from the aftermath of the Diet of Speyer (February 1529), which voted to end the toleration of Lutheranism in Germany. In April of the same year, six German princes and 14 cities protested against this oppressive measure, defending freedom of conscience and the rights of religious minorities. The term “Protestant” derives from this protest. It is therefore not strictly correct to apply the term “Protestant” to individuals prior to April 1529, or to speak of events prior to that date as constituting “the Protestant Reformation.” The term “evangelical” is often used in the literature to refer to the reforming factions at Wittenberg and elsewhere (e.g., in France and Switzerland) prior to this date. Although the word “Protestant” is often used to refer to this earlier period, this use is, strictly speaking, an anachronism.

The German Reformation – Lutheranism

The Lutheran Reformation is particularly associated with the German territories and the pervasive personal influence of one charismatic individual – Martin Luther. Luther was particularly concerned with the doctrine of justification, which formed the central point of his religious thought. The Lutheran Reformation was initially an academic movement, concerned primarily with reforming the teaching of theology at the University of Wittenberg. Wittenberg was an unimportant university, and the reforms introduced by Luther and his colleagues within the theology faculty attracted little attention. It was Luther's personal activities – such as his posting of the famous Ninety-Five Theses, protesting against selling indulgences to raise money for the rebuilding of St. Peter's basilica in Rome (October 31, 1517) – which attracted considerable interest, and brought the ideas in circulation at Wittenberg to the attention of a wider audience.

Strictly speaking, the Lutheran Reformation only began in 1522, when Luther returned to Wittenberg from his enforced isolation in the Wartburg. Luther was condemned for “false doctrine” by the Diet of Worms in 1521. Fearing for his life, certain well-placed supporters removed him in secrecy to the castle known as the Wartburg, until the threat to his safety ceased. In his absence, Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt, one of Luther's academic colleagues at Wittenberg, began a program of reform at Wittenberg which seemed to degenerate into chaos. Convinced that he was needed if the Reformation was to survive Karlstadt's ineptitude, Luther emerged from his place of safety and returned to Wittenberg.

At this point, Luther's program of academic reform changed into a program of reform of church and society. No longer was Luther's forum of activity the university world of ideas; he now found himself regarded as the leader of a religious, social, and political reforming movement which seemed to some contemporary observers to open the way to a new social and religious order in Europe. In fact, Luther's program of reform was much more conservative than that associated with his Reformed colleagues, such as Huldrych Zwingli. Furthermore, it met with considerably less success than some anticipated. The movement remained obstinately tied to

the German territories, and – Scandinavia apart – never gained the foreign power bases which seemed to be like so many ripe apples, ready to fall into its lap.

Luther's understanding of the role of the "godly prince" (which effectively ensured that the monarch had control of the church) does not seem to have had the attraction which might have been expected, particularly in the light of the generally republican sentiments of Reformed thinkers such as Calvin. The case of England is particularly illuminating: here, as in the Low Countries, the Protestant theology which gained the ascendancy was Reformed rather than Lutheran.

The Swiss Reformation – the Reformed church

The origins of the Swiss Reformation, which brought the Reformed churches (such as the Presbyterians) into being, lie in developments within the Swiss Confederation (*Confederatio Helvetica* – hence the modern abbreviation “CH” for Switzerland) in the early sixteenth century. Whereas the German Reformation had its origins primarily in an academic context, the Reformed church owed its origins to a series of attempts to reform the morals and worship of the church (but not necessarily its *doctrine*) according to a more biblical pattern. It must be emphasized that although Calvin gave this style of Reformation its definitive form, its origins are to be traced back to earlier reformers, such as Huldrych Zwingli and Heinrich Bullinger, based in the leading Swiss city of Zurich.

Although most of the early Reformed theologians, such as Zwingli, had an academic background, their reforming programs were not academic in nature. They were directed toward the church as they found it in Swiss cities such as Zurich, Berne, and Basle. Whereas Luther was convinced that the doctrine of justification was of central significance to his program of social and religious reform, the early Reformed thinkers had relatively little interest in doctrine, let alone one specific doctrine. Their reforming program was institutional, social, and ethical, in many ways similar to the demands for reform emanating from the humanist movement.

The consolidation of the Reformed church is generally thought to begin with the stabilization of the Zurich Reformation after Zwingli's death in battle (1531) under his successor, Heinrich Bullinger, and to end with the emergence of Geneva as its power base, and John Calvin as its leading spokesman, in the 1550s. The gradual shift in power within the Reformed church (initially from Zurich to Berne, and subsequently from Berne to Geneva) took place over the period 1520–60, eventually establishing the city of Geneva, its political system (republicanism), and its religious thinkers (initially Calvin, and after his death Theodore Beza) as predominant within the Reformed church. This development was consolidated through the establishment of the Genevan Academy (founded in 1559), at which Reformed pastors were trained. Although Geneva

became part of Switzerland in 1815, in the aftermath of the Napoleonic wars, it was an independent city at the time of the Reformation. This means that the term “Swiss reformation” is being used slightly loosely and anachronistically at this point.

The term “Calvinism” is often used to refer to the religious ideas of the Reformed church. Although still widespread in the literature relating to the Reformation, this practice is now generally discouraged. It is becoming increasingly clear that later sixteenth-century Reformed theology draws on sources other than the ideas of Calvin himself. To refer to later sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Reformed thought as “Calvinist” implies that it is essentially the thought of Calvin – and it is now generally agreed that Calvin’s ideas were modified subtly by his successors. The term “Reformed” is now preferred, whether to refer to those churches (mainly in Switzerland, the Low Countries, and Germany) or religious thinkers (such as Theodore Beza, William Perkins, and John Owen) that based themselves upon Calvin’s celebrated religious textbook, *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, or church documents (such as the famous Heidelberg Catechism) based upon it.

The radical Reformation – Anabaptism

The term “Anabaptist” literally means “rebaptizer,” and refers to what was perhaps the most distinctive aspect of Anabaptist practice: the insistence that only those who had made a personal, public profession of faith should be baptized. Anabaptism seems to have first arisen around Zurich, in the aftermath of Zwingli’s reforms within the city in the early 1520s. It centered on a group of individuals (among whom we may note Conrad Grebel) who argued that Zwingli was not being faithful to his own reforming principles. He preached one thing, and practiced another. Although Zwingli professed faithfulness to the *sola scriptura*, “by Scripture alone,” principle, Grebel argued that he retained a number of practices – including infant baptism, the close link between church and magistracy, and the participation of Christians in warfare – which were not sanctioned or ordained by Scripture. In the hands of such thinkers as Grebel, the *sola scriptura* principle would be radicalized; reformed Christians would believe and practice only those things explicitly taught in Scripture. Zwingli was alarmed by this, seeing it as a destabilizing development which threatened to cut off the Reformed church at Zurich from its historical roots and its continuity with the Christian tradition of the past.

A number of common elements can be discerned within the various strands of the Anabaptist movement: a general distrust of external authority; the rejection of infant baptism in favor of the baptism of adult believers; the common ownership of property; and an emphasis upon pacifism and non-resistance. To take up the third of these points: in 1527, the governments of Zurich, Berne, and St. Gallen accused the Anabaptists of believing “that no true Christian can either give or receive interest or income on a sum of capital; that all temporal goods are free and common, and that all can have full property rights to them.” It is for this reason that Anabaptism is often referred to as the “left wing of the Reformation” (Roland H. Bainton) or the “radical Reformation” (George Hunston Williams). For Williams, the “radical Reformation” was to be contrasted with the “magisterial Reformation,” which he broadly identified with the Lutheran and Reformed movements. These terms are increasingly being accepted within

Reformation scholarship, and you are likely to encounter them in your reading of more recent studies of the movement.

The English Reformation – Anglicanism

The English Reformation took a somewhat different direction than its continental counterpart. Although there was at least some degree of popular pressure for a reform within the church, the leading force for reform was Henry VIII, who ascended the throne in 1509. In 1527, Henry took the first steps to dissolve his marriage to Catherine of Aragon. This decision resulted from Henry's desire to ensure the succession to the English throne. The only child of this marriage, Mary Tudor, was female; Henry wanted a male heir. The pope refused to dissolve or annul the marriage.

It is quite improper to suggest that the English Reformation resulted from the pope's refusal to grant Henry his divorce. Nevertheless, it was a factor. Henry gradually appears to have shifted toward a policy which involved the replacement of papal authority in England with his own authority. The creation of an English national church was part of this vision. Henry seems not to have been particularly interested in matters of doctrine or theology, preferring to concentrate upon the practicalities of religious and political power. His decision to appoint Thomas Cranmer (1489–1556) as Archbishop of Canterbury led to at least some Protestant influences being brought to bear on the English church.

When Henry died in 1547, he was succeeded by his son, Edward VI. Edward was a minor on his accession; as a result, real power was exercised by his advisors, who were generally of a strongly Protestant persuasion. Cranmer, who remained in office as archbishop during Edward's reign, was able to bring in noticeably Protestant forms of public worship, and encouraged leading Protestant thinkers (such as Martin Bucer and Peter Martyr Vermigli) to settle in England, and give theological direction to the Reformation. However, Edward died in 1553, leaving the nation in a state of religious flux.

Edward was succeeded by Mary Tudor, who was strongly Catholic in sympathy. She set in motion a series of measures which suppressed Protestantism, and restored Catholicism. Some of the measures were deeply unpopular, most notably the public burning of Thomas Cranmer at Oxford in 1556. Cranmer was replaced as Archbishop of Canterbury by Reginald

Pole, a moderate Catholic. At the time of her death in 1558, Catholicism had not yet been completely reestablished. When Elizabeth I succeeded to the throne, it was not entirely clear what direction her religious policies might take. In the event, Elizabeth pursued a complex policy, which seems to have been aimed at appeasing both Protestants and Catholics, while allowing the Queen to have supreme authority in matters of religion. What is usually referred to as “the Elizabethan Settlement” (1558–9) established the national English church as a reformed episcopal church, having broadly Protestant articles of faith with a more Catholic **liturgy**. Nobody was really entirely with the outcome, which was widely seen as a compromise; however, it enabled England to emerge from a period of religious tension and avoid the serious religious conflicts that were raging elsewhere in Europe at the time.

The written text of public services, especially of the eucharist.

The Catholic Reformation

This term is often used to refer to the revival within Roman Catholicism in the period following the opening of the Council of Trent (1545). In older scholarly works, the movement is often designated the “Counter-Reformation”: as the term suggests, the Roman Catholic church developed means of combating the Protestant Reformation, in order to limit its influence. It is, however, becoming increasingly clear that the Roman Catholic church countered the Reformation partly by reforming itself from within, in order to remove the grounds of Protestant criticism. In this sense, the movement was a reformation of the Roman Catholic church as much as it was a reaction against the Protestant Reformation.

The same concerns underlying the Protestant Reformation in northern Europe were channeled into the renewal of the Catholic church, particularly in Spain and Italy. The Council of Trent, the foremost component of the Catholic Reformation, clarified Catholic teaching on a number of confusing matters, and introduced much-needed reforms in relation to the conduct of the clergy, ecclesiastical discipline, religious education, and missionary activity. The movement for reform within the church was greatly stimulated by the reformation of many of the older religious orders, and the establishment of new orders (such as the Jesuits). The more specifically theological aspects of the Catholic Reformation will be considered in relation to its teachings on Scripture and tradition, justification by faith, and the sacraments. As a result of the Catholic Reformation, many of the abuses that originally lay behind the demands for reform – whether these came from humanists or Protestants – were removed.

Protestant Orthodoxy

It seems to be a general rule of history that periods of enormous creativity are followed by eras of stagnation. The Reformation is no exception. Perhaps through a desire to preserve the insights of the Reformation, the post-Reformation period witnessed the development of a strongly scholastic approach to theology. The insights of the reformers were codified and perpetuated through the development of a series of systematic presentations of Christian theology. The term “Protestant Orthodoxy” is generally used to refer to the highly systematic statements of both Lutheran and Reformed theology that emerged in the later part of the sixteenth century.

In the period after Calvin’s death a new concern for method – that is, the systematic organization and coherent deduction of ideas – gained momentum. Reformed theologians found themselves having to defend their ideas against both Lutheran and Roman Catholic opponents. Aristotelianism, regarded with a certain degree of suspicion by Calvin, was now seized upon as an ally. As it became increasingly important to demonstrate the internal consistency and coherence of Calvinism, many Calvinist writers turned to Aristotle in the hope that his writings on method would offer hints as to how their theology might be placed upon a firmer rational foundation.

The insights of the reformers were now codified and consolidated through the development of a series of systematic presentations of Christian theology. This process is often referred to as “confessionalization,” meaning the emergence of forms of Christianity which defined themselves with reference to “Confessions of Faith,” such as the Augsburg Confession (1530). As Protestantism grew in strength, tensions between different Protestant groups – above all, Lutheran and Reformed churches – became of increasing significance, eventually rivaling the older tension between Protestantism and Catholicism.

To appreciate why these developments took place, we need to reflect on the political situation in Europe, especially Germany, in the later sixteenth century. In the 1550s, Lutheranism and Roman Catholicism were well established in different regions of Germany. A religious stalemate had developed, in which further expansion into Roman Catholic regions by Lutheranism was no longer possible. Lutheran writers therefore

concentrated upon defending Lutheranism at the academic level, by demonstrating its internal consistency and faithfulness to Scripture. They believed that by showing Lutheranism to be intellectually respectable, they might make it attractive to Roman Catholics disillusioned with their own system of beliefs.

But this was not to be the case. Roman Catholic writers responded with increasingly sophisticated works of systematic theology, drawing on the writings of Thomas Aquinas. The Society of Jesus (founded in 1534) rapidly established itself as a leading intellectual force within the Roman Catholic church. Its leading writers, such as Roberto Bellarmine and Francisco de Suarez, made major contributions to the intellectual defense of Roman Catholicism.

The situation in Germany became even more complicated during the 1560s and 1570s, as Calvinism began to make major inroads into previously Lutheran territory. Three major Christian denominations were now firmly established in the same area: Lutheranism, Calvinism, and Roman Catholicism. All three were under considerable pressure to identify themselves. Lutherans were obliged to explain how they differed from Calvinists on the one hand, and Roman Catholics on the other. Doctrine proved the most reliable way of identifying and explaining these differences: “We believe this, but they believe that.” The period 1559–1622, characterized by its new emphasis upon doctrine, is generally referred to as the “period of Orthodoxy.” A new form of scholasticism began to develop within both Protestant and Roman Catholic theological circles, as both sought to demonstrate the rationality and sophistication of their systems.

Lutheranism and Calvinism were, in many respects, very similar. They both claimed to be evangelical and rejected more or less the same central aspects of medieval Catholicism. But they needed to be distinguished. On most points of doctrine, Lutherans and Calvinists were in broad agreement. Yet there was one matter upon which they were radically divided: the doctrine of predestination. The emphasis placed upon the doctrine of predestination by Calvinists in the period 1559–1622 partly reflects the fact that this doctrine most sharply distinguished them from their Lutheran colleagues.

The following two developments are of especial importance during this period:

1. *A new concern for theological method.* Reformers such as Luther and Calvin had relatively little interest in questions of method. For them, theology was primarily concerned with the exposition of Scripture. Indeed, Calvin's *Institutes* may be regarded as a work of "biblical theology," bringing together the basic ideas of Scripture into an orderly presentation. However, in the writings of Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor as director of the Genevan Academy, there can be seen a new concern for questions of method, as noted above. The logical arrangement of material, and its grounding in first principles, comes to assume paramount importance. The impact of this development is perhaps most obvious in the way in which Beza handled the doctrine of predestination, to be noted later.

2. *The development of works of systematic theology.* The rise of scholasticism within Lutheran, Calvinist, and Roman Catholic theological circles led to the appearance of vast works of systematic theology, comparable in many ways to Thomas Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*. These works aimed to present sophisticated and comprehensive accounts of Christian theology, demonstrating the strengths of their positions and the weaknesses of those of their opponents.

Post-Reformation Movements

The Reformations, both Protestant and Catholic, were followed by a period of theological consolidation within both movements. Within Protestantism, both Lutheran and Reformed (or “Calvinist”), the period known as “Orthodoxy” opened up, characterized by its emphasis on doctrinal norms and definitions. Although sympathetic to this doctrinal trend, Puritanism placed considerably greater emphasis on spiritual and pastoral application. Pietism, in contrast, was hostile to this emphasis on doctrine, feeling that the stress on doctrinal orthodoxy obscured the need for a “living faith” on the part of believers. Within post-Tridentine Roman Catholicism (i.e., after the Council of Trent), increasing emphasis came to be placed on the continuity of the Catholic tradition, with Protestantism being viewed as innovative, and hence heterodox.

The consolidation of Catholicism

The Council of Trent (1545–63) represented the definitive response of the Catholic church to the Reformation. The main achievements of the Council may be summarized as follows. First, the Council remedied the problems within the church that had contributed in no small way to the emergence of the Reformation in the first place. Measures were taken to end corruption and abuse within the church. Second, the Council set out the main lines of Catholic teaching on certain central areas of the Christian faith which had become controversial as a result of the Reformation – such as the relation between Scripture and tradition, the doctrine of justification, and the nature and role of the sacraments. (It should be noted that Trent did not address issues such as Christology or the doctrine of the Trinity, precisely because these were not the subject of debate with its Protestant opponents.) As a result, Roman Catholicism was now well prepared to meet the challenges of its Protestant adversaries. The final decades of the sixteenth century saw the emergence of a confident, sustained, and significant critique of Protestantism from within the Catholic church.

One of the clearest signs of this new confidence can be seen in Catholic patristic scholarship. The Protestant appeal to the patristic period was initially so effective that some Catholic writers of the middle of the sixteenth century seem to have thought that patristic writers such as Augustine were actually proto-Protestants. However, the final third of the century saw increasing confidence among Roman Catholic writers concerning the continuity between the patristic writers and themselves. The most important work to establish this continuity was Marguerin de la Bigne's *Bibliotheca Patrum* ("Library of the Fathers"), whose eight folio volumes appeared in 1575. This was followed up by major contributions from writers such as Antoine Arnauld and Pierre Nicole.

This new confidence in the continuity of the Catholic tradition led to increasing emphasis being placed upon the constancy of Catholic teaching. The most noted writer to develop this emphasis was Jacques Benigne Bossuet (1627–1704), whose *Histoire des variations des églises protestantes* ("History of the variations of the Protestant churches") became a major weapon in the debates between Roman Catholics and Protestants. According to Bossuet, the teaching of the church remained the same down

the ages. Protestants had departed from this teaching, either by introducing innovations or by denying some of its central elements. They had therefore forfeited their right to be considered orthodox. The apostles had handed down their successors a fixed deposit of truth, which had to be maintained from one generation to another. The slogan *semper eadem* (“always the same”) thus became a highly significant element of Catholic polemics against Protestantism. For Bossuet, Protestantism was easily shown to be an innovation – and hence heterodox for that very reason.

Puritanism

One of the most important styles of theology associated with the English-speaking world emerged in late sixteenth-century England. Puritanism is probably best understood as a version of Reformed Orthodoxy which laid particular emphasis on the experiential and pastoral aspects of faith. The writings of the leading Puritan theologians William Perkins (1558–1602), William Ames (1576–1633), and John Owen (1618–83) are clearly heavily influenced by Beza, particularly in relation to their teaching on the extent of the death of Christ, and the divine sovereignty in providence and election.

In recent years, particular scholarly attention has focused on the pastoral theology of Puritanism. Early seventeenth-century figures such as Laurence Chaderton, John Dod, and Arthur Hildersam were concerned to bring theology to focus on pastoral issues. The Puritan pastoral tradition is widely regarded as having reached its zenith in the ministry and writings of Richard Baxter (1615–91). Baxter's reputation rests in part on his massive *Christian Directory* (1673), whose four parts set out a vision of theology actualized in everyday Christian life. However, his most celebrated work of pastoral theology remains the *Reformed Pastor* (1656), which addresses ministerial issues from a Puritan perspective.

Although Puritanism was a major theological and political force in early seventeenth-century England, its most significant development took place in the New World. The repressive religious policies of King Charles I forced many Puritans to leave England and settle on the eastern coastal regions of North America. As a result, Puritanism became a major shaping force in North American Christianity during the seventeenth century. The most significant American Puritan theologian was Jonathan Edwards (1703–58), who combined a Puritan emphasis upon divine sovereignty with a willingness to engage with the new questions being raised through the rise of a rational worldview. Although Edwards was much in demand as a spiritual director, especially in the aftermath of the eighteenth-century "Great Awakening" (in which he played a prominent, and probably decisive, role), his theology found its practical expression particularly in his ethics. His sermon series on 1 Corinthians 13 was published in 1746 as *Charity and Its Fruits*.

In some respects, particularly in relation to the issue of Christian experience, Puritanism shows affinities with Pietism, to which we now turn.

Pietism

As Orthodoxy became increasingly influential within mainstream Protestantism, so its potential defects and weaknesses became clear. At its best, orthodoxy was concerned with the rational defense of Christian truth claims, and a passionate concern for doctrinal correctness. Yet, too often, this came across as an academic preoccupation with logical niceties, rather than a concern for relating theology to the issues of everyday life. The term “Pietism” derives from the Latin word *pietas* (best translated as “piety” or “godliness”), and was initially a derogatory term used by the movement’s opponents to describe its emphasis upon the importance of Christian doctrine for everyday Christian life.

The Pietist movement is usually regarded as having been inaugurated with the publication of Philip Jakob Spener’s *Pia desideria* (“Pious wishes,” 1675). In this work Spener lamented the state of the German Lutheran church in the aftermath of the Thirty Years War (1618–48), and set out proposals for the revitalization of the church of his day. Chief among these was a new emphasis upon personal Bible study. The proposals were treated with derision by academic theologians; nevertheless, they were to prove influential in German church circles, reflecting growing disillusionment and impatience with the sterility of orthodoxy in the face of the shocking social conditions endured during the war. For Pietism, a reformation of doctrine must always be accompanied by reformation of life.

Pietism developed in a number of different directions, especially in England and Germany. Among the representatives of the movement, two in particular should be noted.

1. *Nikolaus Ludwig Graf von Zinzendorf* (1700–60) founded the Pietist community generally known as the “Herrnhuter,” named after the German village of Herrnhut. Alienated from what he regarded as the arid rationalism and barren orthodoxy of his time, Zinzendorf stressed the importance of a “religion of the heart,” based on an intimate and personal relationship between Christ and the believer. A new emphasis was placed upon the role of “feeling” (as opposed to reason or doctrinal orthodoxy) within the Christian life, which may be regarded as laying the foundations of Romanticism in later German religious thought. Zinzendorf’s emphasis upon a personally appropriated faith finds

expression in the slogan “a living faith,” which he opposed to the dead credal assent of Protestant orthodoxy. These ideas would be developed in one direction by F. D. E. Schleiermacher, and in another by John Wesley, who may be regarded as introducing Pietism to England.

2. *John Wesley* (1703–91) founded the Methodist movement within the Church of England, which subsequently gave birth to Methodism as a denomination in its own right. Convinced that he “lacked the faith whereby alone we are saved,” Wesley discovered the need for a “living faith” and the role of experience in the Christian life through his conversion experience at a meeting in Aldersgate Street in May 1738, in which he felt his heart to be “strangely warmed.” Wesley’s emphasis upon the experiential side of Christian faith, which contrasted sharply with the dullness of contemporary English **Deism**, led to a major religious revival in England.

A view of God that recognizes the divine creatorship, yet rejects the notion of a continuing divine involvement with the world.

Despite their differences, the various branches of Pietism succeeded in making Christian faith relevant to the experiential world of ordinary believers. The movement may be regarded as a reaction against a one-sided emphasis upon doctrinal orthodoxy, in favor of a faith which relates to the deepest aspects of human nature.

Key Theologians

The Reformation era is widely regarded as one of the most creative in the history of Christian theology. Three theologians are usually singled out as being of particular significance: Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Huldrych Zwingli. Of these, the first two are of especial importance. Although Zwingli is a major figure in his own right, he has been overshadowed by the creative talent and greater theological impact of Luther and Calvin. However, other theologians began to emerge as being of significance in the later sixteenth century, as new agendas and issues emerged. We shall note here eight theologians of particular significance.

Martin Luther

Martin Luther (1483–1546) was educated at the University of Erfurt, initially studying within the faculty of arts, before beginning the study of theology at the local Augustinian monastery. He gained an appointment as professor of biblical studies at the University of Wittenberg in 1512, and lectured on the Psalms (1513–15), Romans (1515–16), Galatians (1516–17), and Hebrews (1517–18). During this period, Luther's theology can be seen to have gone through a series of developments, especially in relation to the doctrine of justification. His close engagement with biblical texts during this period appears to have led him to become increasingly dissatisfied with the views of the *via moderna* on the subject.

Luther first came to public attention in 1517, through the publication of his Ninety-Five Theses on Indulgences. This was followed by the Leipzig Disputation (June–July 1519), in which Luther established a reputation as a radical critic of scholasticism. In 1520 he published three treatises which consolidated his growing reputation as a theological reformer. In the *Appeal to the Christian Nobility of the German Nation* Luther argued passionately for the need for reform of the church. In both its doctrine and its practices, the church of the early sixteenth century had cast itself adrift from the New Testament. His pithy and witty German gave added popular appeal to some intensely serious theological ideas.

Encouraged by the remarkable success of this work, Luther followed it up with *The Babylonian Captivity of the Christian Church*. In this powerful piece of writing, Luther argued that the gospel had become captive to the institutional church. The medieval church, he argued, had imprisoned the gospel in a complex system of priests and sacraments. The church had become the master of the gospel, where it should be its servant. This point was further developed in *The Liberty of a Christian*, in which Luther explored the implications of the doctrine of justification by faith for the Christian life.

Luther was perhaps the most creative of the reformers. Yet his theological impact does not rest upon any major work of theology. Most of Luther's writings were produced in response to some controversy. Only his two Catechisms (1529) can really be thought of as systematic presentations of the basic ideas of the Christian faith. Their largely pastoral role probably

disqualifies them from being taken seriously as works of academic theology. Nevertheless, aspects of Luther's theology have had a deep impact upon western Christian thought. For example, his "theology of the cross," set out briefly in a document of 1518 (the *Heidelberg Disputation*), has had a considerable impact upon twentieth-century theology, as works such as Jürgen Moltmann's *Crucified God* indicate (see p. 195).

Huldrych Zwingli

The Swiss reformer Huldrych Zwingli (1484–1531) was educated at the universities of Vienna and Basle, before taking up parish duties in eastern Switzerland. It is clear that he took a keen interest in the agenda of Christian **humanism**, especially the writings of Erasmus, and became committed to belief in the need to reform the church of his day. In 1519 he took up a pastoral position in the city of Zurich, where he used the pulpit of the Great Minster, the chief church within the city, to propagate a program of reform. Initially, this program was primarily concerned with reformation of the morals of the church. However, it soon extended to include criticism of the existing theology of the church, especially its sacramental theology. The term “Zwinglian” is used especially to refer to the belief, associated with Zwingli, that Christ is not present at the eucharist, which is best seen as a memorial of Christ’s death.

Intellectual movement linked with the European Renaissance, at the heart of which lay a new interest in the cultural achievements of antiquity.

Zwingli, who died in battle, was of major importance in relation to the early propagation of the Reformation, especially in eastern Switzerland. However, he never achieved the same impact as Luther or Calvin, lacking the creativity of the former and the systematic approach of the latter. The reader will encounter considerable variation in the spelling of Zwingli’s forename, with “Ulrich” and “Huldreich” often being used in preference to “Huldrych.”

John Calvin

The French reformer Jean Calvin (1509–64) – invariably referred to as “John” in English-language works – was born in Noyon, northeast of Paris, in 1509. Educated at the scholasticism-dominated University of Paris, he subsequently moved to the more humanist University of Orléans, at which he studied civil law. Although initially inclined to a career of scholarship, he underwent a conversion experience in his mid-twenties, which led to his becoming increasingly associated with reforming movements in Paris, and eventually being forced into exile in Basle. Eventually, he settled in the city of Geneva, which had achieved its independence and converted to Protestantism in 1535. By the time of his death in 1564, Calvin had made Geneva the center of an international movement, which came to bear his name. Calvinism is still one of the most potent and significant intellectual movements in human history.

The second generation of reformers was far more aware of the need for works of systematic theology than the first. Calvin, the major figure of the second period of the Reformation, saw the need for a work which would set out clearly the basic ideas of evangelical theology, justifying them on the basis of Scripture and defending them in the face of Catholic criticism. In 1536 he published a small work entitled *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, a mere six chapters in length. For the next quarter of a century Calvin worked away at this, adding extra chapters and rearranging the material. By the time of its final edition (1559), the work had 80 chapters and was divided into four books. By then, it was firmly established as one of the most important religious works of the sixteenth century.

Teresa of Avilà

Most of the writers noted in this chapter are systematic theologians. Teresa of Avilà (1515–82) represents a quite different approach to theology, which needs to be noted and respected – namely, “mystical theology” or spirituality. For Teresa, theology is about a transformed personal relationship with God, which cannot adequately be expressed in human words. Teresa was a Carmelite, part of the great revival of spirituality which took place in Spain during the second half of the sixteenth century. Her most famous work is *The Interior Castle of the Soul*, in which she uses a fundamentally Trinitarian theological framework to explore how God illuminates and transforms the life of the believer. Growth in prayer enables the individual believer to enter into deeper intimacy with God, using the image of a progressive journey through the apartments (or mansions) of the castle from the outermost to the luminous center. Teresa was declared to be a “doctor of the church” by Pope Paul VI in 1970 – the first woman to be accorded this honor.

Theodore Beza

Beza (1519–1605), also known by his French name “Théodore de Bèze, was a noted Calvinist writer and served as professor of theology at the Genevan Academy from 1559 to 1599. The three volumes of his *Tractationes theologicae* (“Theological treatises,” 1570–82) present a rationally coherent account of the main elements of Reformed theology, using Aristotelian logic. The result is a tightly argued and rationally defensible account of Calvin’s theology, in which some of the unresolved tensions of that theology (chiefly relating to the doctrines of predestination and atonement) are clarified. Some writers have suggested that Beza’s concern for logical clarity leads him to misrepresent Calvin at a number of critical points; others have argued that Beza merely streamlined Calvin’s theology, tidying up some loose ends.

Johann Gerhard

Gerhard (1582–1637) was perhaps the most important Lutheran Orthodox theologian. He was appointed professor of theology at the University of Jena in 1616, where he remained for the rest of his teaching career. Gerhard recognized the need for a systematic presentation of Lutheran theology in the face of intense Calvinist opposition. The basic form of Lutheran works of systematic theology had been laid down in 1521, when Philip Melancthon published the first edition of his *Loci communes* (“Commonplaces”), in which subjects were treated topically, rather than systematically. Gerhard continued this tradition, but felt able to draw increasingly upon Aristotelian works of logic. His *Loci communes theologici* (“Theological commonplaces,” 1610–22) remained a classic of Lutheran theology for many years.

Roberto Bellarmine

Of the theologians to achieve eminence during the golden period of Catholic theology after the Council of Trent, the most important is probably Roberto Bellarmine (1542–1621), who entered the Society of Jesus in 1560, and subsequently became professor of controversial theology at Rome in 1576. He remained in this position until 1599, when he became a cardinal. His most significant work is generally regarded to be the *Disputationes de controversiis Christianae fidei* (“Disputations concerning the controversies of the Christian faith,” 1586–93), in which he argued forcibly for the rationality of Catholic theology against its Protestant (both Lutheran and Calvinist) critics.

Jonathan Edwards

It is universally agreed that Jonathan Edwards (1703–58) is America's first great theologian. Although there are some important dissenting voices, many would also argue that he remains America's greatest Christian theologian. Edwards was born at East Windsor, Connecticut on October 5, 1703. His father was a local pastor, under whose ministry a series of revivals would take place in the 1720s. In September 1716 Edwards entered Yale College, New Haven (now Yale University), where he later served as tutor from 1724 to 1726. When he was around 17 years of age, Edwards underwent a conversion experience. As he read 1 Timothy 1: 17, he was overwhelmed by a sense of God's greatness and glory. "As I read the words," he wrote later in his personal journal, "there came into my soul, and it was, as it were, diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the divine Being; a new sense quite different from anything I ever experienced before."

Edwards played a major role in the "Great Awakening," which began in the winter of 1734–5, probably the most significant revivalist movement of its age. In 1757 Edwards was invited to become president of the College of New Jersey, Princeton (now Princeton University). Following an unsuccessful inoculation against smallpox, he died at Princeton on March 22, 1758.

Edwards is remembered as a remarkable theologian. He can be seen as a Puritan writer, giving intellectual and spiritual stamina to a movement often noted for its anti-intellectualism and moral excesses. Perhaps more importantly, Edwards represents a theologian who was aware of the challenges to traditional Christian theology that were emerging from the Enlightenment, and had the foresight and theological acumen to provide an alternative way of conceptualizing and proclaiming the Christian faith within a rationalist culture.

Key Theological Developments

The Reformation was a complex movement with a very broad agenda. The debates of the sixteenth century, which extended into the seventeenth century and beyond, centered in part upon the sources of Christian theology, and in part upon the doctrines that resulted from the application of those sources. We shall consider these matters individually.

The sources of theology

The mainstream Reformation was concerned not with establishing a new Christian tradition, but with the renewal and correction of an existing tradition. Arguing that Christian theology was ultimately grounded in Scripture, reformers such as Luther and Calvin argued for the need to return to Scripture as the primary and critical source of Christian theology. The slogan “by Scripture alone” (*sola scriptura*) became characteristic of the Protestant reformers, expressing their basic belief that Scripture was the sole necessary and sufficient source of Christian theology. However, as we shall see later (p. 150), this did not mean that they denied the importance of tradition.

This new emphasis upon Scripture had a number of direct consequences, of which the following are of especial importance:

1. Beliefs which could not be demonstrated to be grounded in Scripture were either to be rejected, or to be declared as binding on no one. For example, the reformers had little time for the doctrine of the immaculate conception of Mary (that is, the belief that Mary, as the mother of Jesus, was conceived without any taint from sin). They regarded this as lacking any biblical warrant, and thus discarded it.
2. A new emphasis came to be placed upon the public status of Scripture within the church. The expository sermon, the biblical commentary, and works of biblical theology (such as Calvin’s *Institutes*) came to be characteristic of the Reformation.

The Council of Trent, responding to these developments, insisted that Scripture and tradition were to be given equal weight in theological deliberations. Scripture needed to be interpreted reliably; the Protestants, for writers such as Bellarmine, had made it open to highly subjective individualist interpretations, which would be destructive of both church order and doctrine.

The doctrine of grace

The first period of the Reformation is dominated by the personal agenda of Martin Luther. Convinced that the church had lapsed into an unwitting **Pelagianism**, Luther proclaimed the doctrine of justification by faith to whomever would listen to him. The question “How can I find a gracious God?” and the slogan “by faith alone” (*sola fide*) resonated throughout much of western Europe, and attracted him a hearing among a substantial section of the church. The issues involved in this doctrine are complex, and will be discussed in detail at the appropriate point later in this volume (see pp. 154–63).

Early heresy which taught that humans are able to merit their salvation by works rather than divine grace.

The doctrine of justification by faith is especially associated with the Lutheran Reformation. Calvin, while continuing to honor this doctrine, initiated a trend which became of increasing importance in later Reformed theology: the discussion of grace in relation to the doctrine of predestination, rather than justification. For Reformed theologians, the ultimate statement of the “grace of God” was not to be seen in the fact that God justified sinners; rather, it was to be seen in God’s election of humanity without reference to their foreseen merits or achievements. The doctrine of “unconditional election” came to be seen as a concise summary of the unmerited nature of grace.

The Council of Trent and later Catholic writers regarded such views as a distortion of the teachings of Augustine, and argued vigorously for a return to his ideas. They argued that the Protestant emphasis on justification by faith alone failed to do justice to the New Testament’s emphasis on the importance of good works in the Christian life. In addition, they insisted that Protestants had misrepresented Augustine’s teaching on what justification actually was, interpreting it to mean “being accounted as righteous,” whereas the clear sense of his teaching was “to be made righteous.”

The doctrine of the sacraments

By the 1520s the view had become well established within reforming circles that the sacraments were outward signs of the invisible grace of God. This forging of a link between the sacraments and the doctrine of justification (a development especially associated with Luther and his colleague at Wittenberg, Philip Melanchthon) led to a new interest in the theology of the sacraments. It was not long before this area of theology became the subject of considerable controversy, the reformers disagreeing with their Catholic opponents over the number and nature of the sacraments, and Luther and Zwingli arguing furiously over whether Christ was really present at communion services (see pp. 164–7).

The Council of Trent reaffirmed the traditional teaching concerning the number and identity of the sacraments, while strongly defending the concept of “**transubstantiation**” against its Protestant critics, both Lutheran and Reformed.

Belief that the bread and wine are physically transformed into the body and blood of Christ in the eucharist.

The doctrine of the church

If the first generation of reformers were preoccupied with the question of grace, the second generation turned to address the question of the church. Having broken away from the mainstream of the Catholic church over the doctrine of grace, the reformers came under increasing pressure to develop a coherent theory of the church which would justify this break, and give a basis for the new evangelical churches springing up in the cities of western Europe. Where Luther is especially linked with the doctrine of grace, it is Martin Bucer and John Calvin who made the decisive contributions to the development of Protestant understandings of the church. Those understandings have since become increasingly significant in global Christianity, especially during the late twentieth century.

In response to such developments, the Council of Trent emphasized the historical and institutional importance of the church, arguing that Protestants had placed themselves outside its bounds. The church was a divinely ordained and divinely instituted society; salvation was not possible outside its boundaries.

Developments in Theological Literature

The Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century led to significant developments in theological literature, reflecting the high profile of theological issues at the time. One of the most interesting aspects of the Protestant Reformation was its awareness of the need to communicate and defend its ideas. This led to several important genres of theological literature assuming a significant role at this time.

1. *Catechisms*: popular presentations of Christian faith, from a Reformation perspective, aimed particularly at educating children.
2. *Confessions of faith*: statements of the main theological affirmations of a grouping within the Reformation (Lutheran, Reformed, or Anabaptist), aimed at an adult audience.
3. *Works of systematic theology*, including Melanchthon's *Loci communes* and Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, which offered a systematic analysis and defense of Lutheran or Reformed theology.

We shall consider each of these genres of theological literature in what follows.

Catechisms

Although what would now be agreed to be catechisms can be found in the medieval church, it is generally agreed that the extensive use of catechisms is especially associated with the Reformation. A visitation of Lutheran churches in Saxony over the period 1528–9 showed that most pastors and almost all laypersons were ignorant of basic Christian teachings. Luther was shocked by his findings, and decided to put in place measures to increase public knowledge of basic Christian teachings.

The first result of Luther's new concern in this area made its appearance in April 1529. Although Luther himself termed it a "German Catechism," it is now more generally known as the "Greater Catechism." The work provides a detailed analysis of the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, and the Lord's Prayer. These sections were followed by discussions of the two sacraments of the church – baptism and the "sacrament of the altar" (or Communion service). The work does not show Luther at his best. It draws upon earlier sermonical material, and was not written specifically for the purpose of catechizing. As a result, it failed to meet its goals.

This was followed in May 1529 by what is now known as the "Lesser Catechism." This work was written specifically for this purpose, and shows a lightness of touch, an ease of communication, and a general simplicity of expression which ensured that it was widely used and appreciated. The work was a remarkable success and was widely adopted within Lutheran institutions. Its question-and-answer format was ideally suited to learning by rote, and the work was widely adopted within the schools of the region. It is important to note that both Luther's 1529 catechisms were written in German, the language of the people. Luther avoided the use of Latin for this purpose, recognizing the severe limitations which the use of this scholarly language would have on the appeal and readership of the works.

The Reformed churches were not slow to appreciate the importance of this literary genre and the educational advantages which it so clearly offered. After some experimentation, Calvin finally produced the "Geneva Catechism" in French (1542) and in Latin (1545). This catechism was widely used within the Reformed constituency until 1563. It was at this point that the "Heidelberg Catechism" made its appearance. The origins of this major work lie in the growth of the Reformed church within Germany,

particularly within the Palatinate. Elector Frederick III commissioned two Reformed theologians (Kaspar Olevianus and Zacharias Ursinus) to produce a catechism suitable for use in his churches. The result was a German-language catechism of 129 questions, which could be arranged in 52 blocks of material to permit regular teaching throughout the year.

The extensive Protestant use of catechisms, and the significant results which they achieved, led their Catholic opponents to develop the format. Earlier Catholic catechisms tended to avoid the question-and-answer format, and offered extensive discussions of points of theological importance. An excellent example of this may be found in Johann Dietenberger's 1537 catechism, which takes the form of a discussion of the Apostles' Creed, the Lord's Prayer, the Ten Commandments, the "Hail Mary," and the seven sacraments. However, the superiority of the question-and-answer approach became obvious, and was incorporated into Peter Canisius's three catechisms, published over the period 1554–8. This work was published in Latin, as was the more substantial Tridentine Catechism of 1566. While its cumbersome format ensured that it was hardly ever used, the work's appearance in the aftermath of the Council of Trent may be regarded as an important recognition of the significance of the genre.

Confessions of faith

We have already noted how the Reformation placed considerable emphasis upon the authority of Scripture. Yet the Bible needed to be interpreted. As the controversy between the magisterial and radical reformers made clear, there were issues of interpretation which were both divisive and elusive. There was clearly a need for some form of “official” means of setting out the ideas of the Reformation, to avoid confusion. This role was played by the “Confessions of Faith.” In view of the importance of these documents, we may consider their place within the thought of the Reformation.

The magisterial Reformation, while placing considerable emphasis upon the authority of Scripture, also recognized a role for the Christian consensus of the past – an idea usually referred to as “Tradition 1” (see p. 150). In general terms, Protestant theologians can be thought of as recognizing three levels or strata of authority:

1. *Scripture*. This was regarded by the magisterial reformers as possessing supreme authority in matters of Christian belief and conduct.

2. *The creeds of Christendom*. These documents, such as the Apostles’ Creed and the Nicene Creed, were regarded by the magisterial reformers as representing the consensus of the early church, and as being accurate and authoritative interpretations of Scripture. Although they were to be regarded as *derivative* or *secondary* in terms of their authority, they were seen as an important check against the individualism of the radical Reformation (which generally declined to regard these creeds as having any authority). The authority of the creeds was recognized by both Protestants and Catholics, as well as by the various constituent elements within the mainline Reformation.

3. *Confessions of faith*. These documents were regarded as authoritative by specific groupings within the Reformation. Thus the Augsburg Confession (1530) was recognized by early Lutheran churches as possessing authority. Other groups within the Reformation did not, however, regard it in this way. Specific confessions of faith were, for example, drawn up by other groups within the Reformation. Some were linked with the Reformation in specific cities – for example, the First Confession of Basle (1534) and the Geneva Confession (1536).

The basic pattern within the Reformation was thus to acknowledge Scripture as possessing primary and universal authority; the creeds as secondary and universal authority; and the Confessions as tertiary and local authority (in that such Confessions were only regarded as binding by a denomination or church in a specific region). The development of the Reformed wing of the Reformation was complex, with the result that a number of Confessions – each linked with a specific region – came to be influential. The following are of particular importance:

Date	Title	Geographical region
1559	Gallic Confession	France
1560	Scottish Confession	Scotland
1561	Belgic Confession	The Lowlands
1563	Thirty-Nine Articles	England
1566	Second Helvetic Confession	Western Switzerland

Works of systematic theology

The need for a systematic presentation of the theology of the Reformation was obvious from an early stage. The first work to fill this gap had its origins within the Lutheran Reformation. Philip Melanchthon established the definitive pattern for Lutheran works of systematic theology in 1521, through the publication of his *Loci communes* (“Commonplaces”). In its first edition this work simply treated a number of subjects of obvious relevance to the Lutheran Reformation, including the important theme of justification by faith.

Gradually, however, polemical and educational considerations obliged Melanchthon to expand the work considerably. New issues needed to be addressed, and additional material had to be included to meet the growing demands of its readers. Melanchthon met this challenge in a surprisingly inadequate manner: he merely added additional material, regardless of the impression of a lack of a unified structure this created. It soon became evident that this way of handling material was clumsy and disorganized, incapable of achieving the systematic analysis needed for the theological debates of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The greatest and last work of this kind is *Loci communes theologici* by Johann Gerard, professor at Jena, published in nine volumes (1610–22). It is for this reason that Melanchthon’s approach to systematic theology ultimately lost out to the much more organized system of John Calvin, to which we now turn.

Calvin’s *Institutes of the Christian Religion* had its origins within the Reformed wing of the Protestant Reformation. The first edition, published in March 1536, was modeled on Luther’s “Lesser Catechism” (see p. 142) of 1529. Both its structure and substance indicate the extent to which Calvin has drawn upon this major educational work of the early German Reformation. Its 516 small-format pages comprise six chapters, the first four of which are modeled on Luther’s catechism. The second edition of the *Institutes* dates from Calvin’s Strasbourg period, and was published in Latin in 1539. The most obvious and important difference in the volume is that of size: the new work is about three times as long as the first edition of 1536, with 17 chapters instead of six. Two opening chapters now deal with the knowledge of God and the knowledge of human nature. Additional material was added on the doctrine of the Trinity, the relation of the Old and New

Testaments, penitence, justification by faith, the nature and relation of providence and predestination, and the nature of the Christian life. Although the work retained much material drawn from the earlier edition, it is evident that its character and status have changed. It is no longer a catechism; it is well on the way to being a definitive statement of the nature of the Christian faith, inviting comparison with the *Summa Theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas.

The work underwent expansion and revision in later editions. The final edition of 1559 had 80 chapters – a vast expansion from the original six chapters of 1536. The material is now distributed among four “books,” arranged as follows:

- the knowledge of God the creator;
- the knowledge of God the redeemer;
- the manner of participation in the grace of Jesus Christ;
- the external means or aids which God uses to bring us to Jesus Christ.

It is possible that Calvin adapted the fourfold structure of the edition of 1543 to create the new division of material. An alternative explanation, however, is that he noticed and adapted the fourfold division of material in the *Four Books of the Sentences* of Peter Lombard, a seminal medieval theologian to whom Calvin often refers. Was Calvin setting himself up as the Protestant successor to Peter Lombard, and his *Institutes* as the successor to his great theological textbook? We shall never know. What we do know is that the *Institutes* was now firmly established as the most influential theological work of the Protestant Reformation, eclipsing in importance the rival works of Luther, Melanchthon, and Zwingli.

Part of the process of theological consolidation and renewal within Catholicism after the Council of Trent was the production of numerous works of systematic theology. These took a wide variety of forms. The form of “loci” or theological topics, originally introduced by the Protestant writer Melanchthon, proved attractive to many Catholic writers. The Spanish Dominican theologian Melchior Cano introduced it, noting its advantages both as a convenient way of presenting Catholic ideas, and also for combating Protestant ideas. Cano’s *Loci theologici* was first published in 1563, three years after the author’s death, and went into 26 editions: eight in Spain, nine in Italy, seven in Germany, and two in France. Numerous writers during the following century produced works using more or less the same format, such as Seraphimus Ractus (Razzi) (d.1613) and Petrus de Lorca (d.1606).

Most observers regard Catholic theology as being primarily concerned to refute Protestantism at this time, and single out Roberto Bellarmine for developing controversial theology to the point at which it virtually became a form of art. His most famous work is *Disputationes de controversiis Christianae fidei adversus hujus temporis hereticos* (“Disputations concerning the controversies of the Christian faith against the heretics of this age”), first published in 1586.

Key Names, Words, and Phrases

By the end of this chapter, you will have encountered the following terms, some of which will recur during the work. Ensure that you are familiar with them! They have been capitalized as you are likely to encounter them in normal use.

Anabaptism

Calvinist

Catholic Reformation

confessionalism

Deism

evangelical

Lutheran

Methodism

orthodoxy

Pietism

Protestant

Puritan

Reformed

Questions

1. What does the term “Reformation” mean?
2. Which reformer is especially associated with the doctrine of justification by faith alone?
3. How important was humanism to the origins and development of the Reformation?
4. Why did the reformers come to place such emphasis upon revising existing doctrines of the church?
5. What factors led to the development of (a) confessionalism and (b) Pietism?
6. Why did post-Tridentine (Council of Trent) Roman Catholic writers place such an emphasis on continuity with the early church?

Case Studies

Case study 3.1 Bible and tradition in the Reformation debates

The sixteenth century witnessed a major debate over the authority and interpretation of the Bible, which continues to be both interesting and significant. The Reformation called into question established understandings of the matter, and forced a debate over an issue which had hitherto not been considered to be especially significant. The present case study explores this debate, and the positions associated with three participants: the magisterial, radical, and Catholic Reformations respectively.

“The Bible,” wrote William Chillingworth, “I say, the Bible only, is the religion of Protestants.” These famous words of this seventeenth-century English Protestant summarize the Reformation attitude to Scripture. Calvin stated the same principle less memorably, if more fully: “Let this then be a sure axiom: that nothing ought to be admitted in the church as the Word of God, save that which is contained, first in the Law and the Prophets, and secondly in the writings of the Apostles; and that there is no other method of teaching in the church than according to the prescription and rule of his Word.” For Calvin, as we shall see, the institutions and regulations of both church and society were required to be grounded in Scripture: “I approve only of those human institutions which are founded upon the authority of God and derived from Scripture.” Zwingli entitled his 1522 tract on Scripture *On the Clarity and Certainty of the Word of God*, stating that “the foundation of our religion is the written word, the Scriptures of God.” Such statements indicate the consistently high view of Scripture adopted by the reformers.

This view is not, it must be stressed, a novelty; it represents a major point of continuity with medieval theology, which – certain later Franciscan writers excepted – regarded Scripture as the most important source of Christian doctrine. The difference between the reformers and medieval

theology at this point concerns how Scripture is defined and interpreted rather than the status which it is given. We shall explore these points further in what follows.

The canon of Scripture

Central to any program that treats Scripture as normative is the delimitation of Scripture. In other words, what is Scripture? The term “canon” (a Greek word meaning “rule” or “norm”) came to be used to refer to those Scriptures recognized as authentic by the church. For medieval theologians, “Scripture” meant “those works included in the Vulgate.” The reformers, however, called this judgment into question. While all the New Testament works were accepted as canonical – Luther’s misgivings concerning four of them gaining little support – doubts were raised concerning the canonicity of a group of Old Testament works. A comparison of the contents of the Old Testament in the Hebrew Bible, on the one hand, and the Greek and Latin versions (such as the Vulgate), on the other, shows that the latter contain a number of works not found in the former.

Following the lead of Jerome, the reformers argued that the only Old Testament writings which could be regarded as belonging to the canon of Scripture were those originally included in the Hebrew Bible. A distinction was thus drawn between the “Old Testament” and “Apocrypha”: the former consisted of works found in the Hebrew Bible, while the latter consisted of works found in the Greek and Latin Bibles (such as the Vulgate), but not in the Hebrew Bible. While some reformers allowed that the apocryphal works were edifying reading, there was general agreement that these works could not be used as the basis of doctrine. Medieval theologians, however, to be followed by the Council of Trent in 1546, defined the “Old Testament” as “those Old Testament works contained in the Greek and Latin bibles,” thus eliminating any distinction between “Old Testament” and “Apocrypha.”

A fundamental distinction thus developed between Roman Catholic and Protestant understandings of what the term “Scripture” actually meant. This distinction persists to the present day. A comparison of Protestant versions of the Bible – the two most important being the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) and New International Version (NIV) – with a Roman Catholic Bible, such as the Jerusalem Bible, will reveal these differences. For the reformers, the slogan *sola scriptura* (“by Scripture alone”) thus

implied not merely one, but two, differences from their Catholic opponents: not only did they attach a different status to Scripture, but they disagreed over what Scripture actually was. But what is the relevance of this dispute?

In practice, it has to be said, the distinction was of little practical importance. It certainly had a bearing on one Catholic practice to which the reformers took particular exception – praying for the dead. To the reformers, this practice rested upon a non-biblical foundation (the doctrine of purgatory), and encouraged popular superstition and ecclesiastical exploitation. Their Catholic opponents, however, were able to meet this objection by pointing out that the practice of praying for the dead was explicitly mentioned in Scripture, at 2 Maccabees 12: 40–6. The reformers, having declared that this book was apocryphal (and hence not part of the Bible), were able to respond that, in their view at least, the practice was not scriptural. This merited the obvious riposte from the Catholic side – that the reformers based their theology on Scripture only after having excluded from the canon of Scripture any works which happened to contradict this theology.

One outcome of this debate was the production and circulation of authorized lists of books which were to be regarded as “scriptural.” The fourth session of the Council of Trent (1546) produced a detailed list, which included the works of the Apocrypha as authentically scriptural, while the Protestant congregations in Switzerland, France, and elsewhere produced lists which deliberately omitted reference to these works, or else indicated that they were of no importance in matters of doctrine.

The authority of Scripture

The reformers grounded the authority of Scripture in its relation to the Word of God. For some, that relation was an absolute identity: Scripture is the Word of God. For others, the relation was slightly more nuanced: Scripture contains the Word of God. Nevertheless, there was a consensus that Scripture was to be received as if it were God himself speaking. For Calvin, the authority of Scripture was grounded in the fact that the biblical writers were “secretaries of the Holy Spirit.” As Heinrich Bullinger stated it, the authority of Scripture was absolute and autonomous: “Because it is the Word of God, the holy biblical Scripture has adequate standing and credibility in itself and of itself.” Here was the gospel itself, able to speak

for itself and challenge and correct its inadequate and inaccurate representations in the sixteenth century. Scripture was able both to pass judgment upon the late medieval church (and find it wanting) and also to provide the model for the new Reformed church which would arise in its wake.

The Catholic opponents of the Reformation, however, argued that, in that the church had defined the canon of Scripture and chosen to treat canonical biblical works as possessing authority, it followed that the church took precedence over the Bible – and therefore that the church had the right to interpret the Bible. This point is made clearly by many leading Catholic critics of Protestantism in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, such as Cardinal Roberto Bellarmine (1542–1621):

Our [Protestant] opponents agree with us that the Scriptures ought to be interpreted in the Spirit in which they were written – that is, the Holy Spirit. The apostle Peter teaches this in 2 Peter 1, when he says, “understand this first, that no prophecies are due to individual interpretation. For the prophecies do not result from human effort. Rather, God’s saints spoke as inspired by the Holy Spirit.” By this, Peter shows that the Scriptures ought not to be interpreted by individual minds, but by the Holy Spirit, because they were written by the inspiration of this Holy Spirit, not the human mind.

So the whole question concerns this: where is that Spirit to be found? We maintain that this Spirit, though often absent from individual people, is most certainly to be found in the church – that is, in a Council of bishops established by the supreme pastor of the whole church, or in the supreme pastor within a Council of the other pastors.

In contrast, the Protestant reformers insisted that the authority of popes, councils, and theologians is subordinate to that of Scripture. This is not necessarily to say that they have no authority: as a matter of fact, the mainline reformers allowed certain councils and theologians of the patristic era a genuine authority in matters of doctrine. Nevertheless, the mainstream reformers argued that such authority is derived from Scripture, and is thus subordinate to Scripture. The Bible, as the Word of God, must be regarded as superior to fathers and councils. Yet, as Calvin argued, the recognition that fathers and councils are of authority “only in so far as they agree with the rule of the Word” did not entail denying them any authority or

significance for Christian theology. As Calvin remarked, “we still give to councils and fathers such rank and honour as it is appropriate for them to hold under Christ.”

The reformers also argued that authority within the church does not derive from the status of the office bearers, but from the Word of God which they serve. Traditional Catholic theology tended to ground the authority of the office bearer in the office itself – for example, the authority of a bishop resides in the fact that he is a bishop – and emphasized the historical continuity of the office of bishop with the apostolic era. The reformers grounded the authority of bishops (or their Protestant equivalent) in their faithfulness to the Word of God. According to Calvin, the Catholics believe that “the church presides over the Word of God,” whereas Protestants held that the church “reverently subjects herself to the Word of God.” Historical continuity thus seemed to Calvin to be of relatively little importance in relation to the faithful proclamation of the Word of God.

The breakaway churches of the Reformation obviously could not claim direct historical continuity with the institutions of the Catholic church: no Catholic bishop would ordain their clergy, for example. Yet the reformers argued that the authority and functions of a bishop ultimately derived from faithfulness to the Word of God. Similarly, the decisions of bishops (and also of councils and popes) are authoritative and binding to the extent that they are faithful to Scripture. Where the Catholics stressed the importance of institutional or historical continuity, the reformers emphasized equally the importance of doctrinal continuity.

While the Protestant churches could not generally provide historical continuity with the episcopacy (except, as in the case of the English or the Swedish reformations, through defections of Catholic bishops), they could supply the necessary fidelity to Scripture – thus, in their view, legitimizing the Protestant ecclesiastical offices. There might not be an unbroken historical link between the leaders of the Reformation and the bishops of the early church – but, the reformers argued, as they believed and taught the same faith as those early church bishops (rather than the distorted gospel of the medieval church), the necessary continuity was there nonetheless.

The *sola scriptura* principle thus involved the claim that the authority of the church was grounded in its fidelity to Scripture. The opponents of the Reformation, however, were able to draw upon a dictum of Augustine: “I should not have believed the gospel, unless I was moved by the authority of

the Catholic church.” Did not the very existence of the canon of Scripture point to the church having authority over Scripture? After all, as we have seen, it was the church which defined what “Scripture” was – and this would seem to suggest that the church had an authority over, and independent of, Scripture. Thus John Eck, Luther’s opponent at the famous Leipzig Disputation of 1519, argued that “Scripture is not authentic without the authority of the church.” This clearly raises the question of the relation between Scripture and tradition, to which we may now conveniently turn.

The role of tradition

The *sola scriptura* principle of the reformers would seem to eliminate any reference to tradition in the formation of Christian doctrine. In fact, however, the magisterial reformers had a very positive understanding of tradition, as we shall see, although the radical reformers did indeed adopt the more negative attitude toward tradition which the slogan might seem to imply. It will be helpful if we begin our discussion of this matter by exploring some understandings of the role of tradition found in the Middle Ages; readers might also like to look at case study 1.1, which examines the issues as they were set out during the patristic period.

For most medieval theologians, Scripture was the materially sufficient source of Christian doctrine. In other words, everything that was of essential importance to the Christian faith was contained in Scripture. There was no need to look anywhere else for material relevant to Christian theology. There were certainly matters on which Scripture had nothing to say – for example, who wrote the Apostles’ Creed, at what precise moment during the celebration of the eucharist the bread and wine became the body and blood of Christ, or whether the practice of baptism was intended solely for adult believers. On these matters, the church felt at liberty to attempt to work out what Scripture implied, although their judgments were regarded as subordinate to Scripture itself.

By the end of the Middle Ages, however, the concept of “tradition” had come to be of major importance in relation to the interpretation and authority of Scripture. Scholars such as Heiko A. Oberman (1930–2001) have shown that two quite different concepts of tradition were in circulation in the late Middle Ages, which may be designated as “Tradition 1” and “Tradition 2.” As we noted earlier (see case study 1.1), in response to

various controversies within the early church, especially the threat from Gnosticism, a “traditional” method of understanding certain passages of Scripture began to develop. Second-century patristic theologians such as Irenaeus of Lyons began to develop the idea of an authorized way of interpreting certain texts of Scripture, which he argued went back to the time of the apostles themselves. Scripture couldn’t be interpreted in any random way: it had to be interpreted within the context of the historical continuity of the Christian church. The parameters of its interpretation were historically fixed and “given.” Oberman designates this understanding of tradition as “Tradition 1.” “Tradition” here means simply “a traditional way of interpreting Scripture within the community of faith.”

In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, however, a somewhat different understanding of tradition developed. “Tradition” was now understood to be a separate and distinct source of revelation in addition to Scripture. Scripture, it was argued, was silent on a number of points – but God had providentially arranged for a second source of revelation to supplement this deficiency: a stream of unwritten tradition, going back to the apostles themselves. This tradition was passed down from one generation to another within the church. Oberman designates this understanding of tradition as “Tradition 2.”

To summarize this important distinction: “Tradition 1” is a single-source theory of doctrine: doctrine is based upon Scripture, and “tradition” refers to a “traditional way of interpreting Scripture.” “Tradition 2” is a dual-source theory of doctrine: doctrine is based upon two quite distinct sources, Scripture and unwritten tradition. A belief which is not to be found in Scripture may thus, on the basis of this dual-source theory, be justified by an appeal to an unwritten tradition. It was primarily against this dual-source theory of doctrine that the reformers directed their criticisms.

During the sixteenth century, the option of totally rejecting tradition was vigorously defended by representatives of the radical Reformation. For radicals such as Thomas Müntzer and Caspar Schwenkfeld, every individual had the right to interpret Scripture as he pleased, subject to the guidance of the Holy Spirit. For Sebastian Franck, the Bible “is a book sealed with seven seals which none can open unless he has the key of David, which is the illumination of the Spirit.” The way was thus opened for individualism, with the private judgment of the individual raised above the corporate judgment of the church. Thus the radicals rejected the practice

of infant baptism (to which the magisterial Reformation remained committed) as non-scriptural. (There is no explicit reference to the practice in the New Testament.) Similarly, doctrines such as the Trinity and the divinity of Christ were rejected as resting upon inadequate scriptural foundations. What we might therefore term “Tradition 0” rejects tradition, and in effect places the private judgment of the individual or congregation in the present above the corporate traditional judgment of the Christian church concerning the interpretation of Scripture.

The three main understandings of the relation between Scripture and tradition current in the sixteenth century can thus be summarized as follows:

Tradition 0: The radical Reformation

Tradition 1: The magisterial Reformation

Tradition 2: The Council of Trent

At first, this analysis might seem surprising. Did not the reformers reject tradition in favor of the scriptural witness alone? In fact, however, the reformers were concerned with the elimination of human additions to or distortions of the scriptural witness. The idea of a “traditional interpretation of Scripture” – embodied in the concept of “Tradition 1” – was perfectly acceptable to the magisterial reformers, provided that this traditional interpretation could be justified.

As has been noted, the magisterial Reformation was theologically conservative. It retained most traditional doctrines of the church – such as the divinity of Jesus Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity – on account of the reformers’ conviction that these traditional interpretations of Scripture were correct. Equally, many traditional practices (such as infant baptism) were retained, on account of the reformers’ belief that they were consistent with Scripture. The magisterial Reformation was painfully aware of the threat of individualism, and attempted to avoid this threat by placing emphasis upon the church’s traditional interpretation of Scripture, where this traditional interpretation was regarded as correct. Doctrinal criticism was directed against those areas in which Catholic theology or practice appeared to have gone far beyond, or to have contradicted, Scripture. As most of these developments took place in the Middle Ages, it is not surprising that the reformers spoke of the period 1200–1500 as an “era of decay” or a “period of corruption” which they had a mission to reform.

Equally, it is hardly surprising that we find the reformers appealing to the early church fathers as generally reliable interpreters of Scripture.

This point is of particular importance, and has not received the attention it merits. One of the reasons why the reformers valued the writings of the fathers, especially Augustine, was that they regarded them as exponents of a biblical theology. In other words, the reformers believed that the fathers were attempting to develop a theology based upon Scripture alone – which was, of course, precisely what they were also trying to do in the sixteenth century. Of course, the new textual and philological methods available to the reformers meant that they could correct the fathers on points of detail – but the reformers were prepared to accept the “patristic testimony” as generally reliable. As that testimony included such doctrines as the Trinity and the divinity of Christ, and such practices as infant baptism, the reformers were predisposed to accept these as authentically scriptural. It will thus be obvious that this high regard for a traditional interpretation of Scripture (i.e., “Tradition 1”) gave the magisterial Reformation a strong bias toward doctrinal conservatism.

The Catholic position

The Council of Trent, meeting in 1546, responded to the threat of the Reformation by affirming a two-source theory. This affirmation by the Catholic Reformation of “Tradition 2” declares that the Christian faith reaches every generation through two sources: Scripture and an unwritten tradition. This extra-scriptural tradition is to be treated as having equal authority with Scripture. In making this declaration, the Council of Trent appears to have picked up the later, and less influential, of the two main medieval understandings of “tradition” – leaving the more influential to the reformers. It is interesting to note that in recent years there has been a certain degree of “revisionism” within Roman Catholic circles on this point, with several contemporary theologians arguing that Trent excluded the view that “the Gospel is only partly in Scripture and partly in the traditions.”

The Fourth Session of the Council, which concluded its deliberations on April 8, 1546, laid down the following challenges to the Protestant position:

1. Scripture could not be regarded as the only source of revelation; tradition was a vital supplement, which Protestants irresponsibly denied. “All saving truths and rules of conduct ... are contained in the

written books and in the unwritten traditions, received from the mouth of Christ himself or from the apostles themselves.”

2. Trent ruled that Protestant lists of canonical books were deficient, and published a full list of works which it accepted as authoritative. This included all the apocryphal books, which Protestant writers had rejected.

3. The Vulgate edition of Scripture was affirmed to be reliable and authoritative. It declared that “the old Latin Vulgate edition, which has been used for many centuries, has been approved by the church, and should be defended as authentic in public lectures, disputations, sermons or expositions, and that no one should dare or presume, under any circumstances, to reject it.”

4. The authority of the church to interpret Scripture was defended, against what the Council of Trent clearly regarded as the rampant individualism of Protestant interpreters: “To check reckless spirits, this council decrees that no one, relying on his or her own judgement, in matters of faith and morals relating to Christian doctrine (distorting the Holy Scriptures in accordance with their own ideas), shall presume to interpret Scripture contrary to that sense accepted by holy mother Church.”

The translation of the Bible

One of the leading themes of the Protestant Reformation was that all core religious texts should be available in the vernacular, so that all could read them. Martin Luther, for example, published several of his reforming treatises in both German and Latin, so that both ordinary people and academics could read them. Most importantly of all, however, Protestantism insisted that the Bible was to be translated into the vernacular, so that all could read it and benefit from it.

One of the clearest statements of the reasons for translating the Bible is found in the Preface to one of the most famous biblical translations of all time – the King James Bible of 1611. Miles Smith, writing on behalf of the translators, offered an account of the benefits of biblical translation to the people of God. Translation allowed them to gain access to the spiritual nourishment found in the Bible. Translation opens a window, to let in the light; breaks the shell, that we may eat the kernel; draws aside the curtain,

that we may look into the most Holy place; removes the cover of the well, that we may drink of its water, “even as Jacob rolled away the stone from the mouth of the well, by which means the flocks of Laban were watered (Genesis 29: 10).” To translate the Bible was thus to be seen as an act of service to the people of God as a whole.

The Council of Trent, however, did not agree. There was no need for translation; after all, it was the job of the clergy to teach the people what the Bible said, and how they were to apply it in their lives. In any case, the Vulgate was a perfectly acceptable Latin translation of the biblical text:

[This Council] ordains and declares, that the said old Vulgate edition, which, through extended use over so many years has been approved of in the Church, should be held as authentic in public lectures, disputations, sermons and expositions; and that no one is to dare, or presume to reject it under any pretext whatever.

Underlying this declaration lies both a desire to keep things the way they were, and a theory of how the laity are to encounter and interpret the Bible – namely, through the intermediary of the church, who is the agent of transmission, translation, and interpretation.

Case Study 3.2 Justification by faith: Protestantism and the Council of Trent

It is widely agreed that the doctrine of justification by faith was of critical importance to the Reformation. The theological debates of this age frequently referenced this doctrine, which was seen as critically important by both sides. The present case study will focus on two broad understandings of this doctrine to be set out at the time of the Reformation – those adopted by Martin Luther and Philip Melanchthon on the one hand, and by the Council of Trent on the other.

At the heart of the Christian faith lies the idea that human beings, finite and frail though they are, can enter into a relationship with the living God. The New Testament articulates this fundamental idea through a number of metaphors or images, such as “salvation” and “redemption,” initially in the writings of the New Testament (especially the Pauline letters) and subsequently in Christian theological reflection, based upon these texts. By the late Middle Ages, one image had come to be seen as especially significant: justification.

The term “justification” and the verb “to justify” came to signify “entering into a right relationship with God,” or perhaps “being made righteous in the sight of God.” The doctrine of justification came to be seen as dealing with the question of what an individual had to do in order to be saved. As contemporary sources indicate, this question came to be asked with increasing frequency as the sixteenth century dawned. The rise of humanism brought with it a new emphasis upon individual consciousness, and a new awareness of human individuality. In the wake of this dawn of the individual consciousness came a new interest in the doctrine of justification – the question of how human beings, as individuals, could enter into a relationship with God. How could a sinner hope to do this? This question lay at the heart of the theological concerns of Martin Luther, and came to dominate the early phase of the Reformation. In view of the importance of the doctrine to this period, we shall consider Luther’s discussion of the doctrine, and the response of the Council of Trent.

Martin Luther

In 1545, the year before he died, Luther contributed a preface to the first volume of the complete edition of his Latin writings, in which he described how he came to break with the church of his day. The preface is clearly written with the aim of introducing Luther to a readership that might not know how Luther came to hold the radical reforming views linked with his name. In this “autobiographical fragment” (as it is usually known), Luther aims to provide those readers with background information about the development of his vocation as a reformer. After dealing with some historical preliminaries, taking his narrative up to the year 1519, he turns to describe his personal difficulties with the problem of the “righteousness of God”:

I had certainly wanted to understand Paul in his letter to the Romans. But what prevented me from doing so was not so much cold feet as that one phrase in the first chapter: “the righteousness of God is revealed in it” (Romans 1: 17). For I hated that phrase, “the righteousness of God,” which I had been taught to understand as the righteousness by which God is righteous, and punishes unrighteous sinners.

Although I lived a blameless life as a monk, I felt that I was a sinner with an uneasy conscience before God. I also could not believe that I had pleased him with my works. Far from loving that righteous God who punished sinners, I actually hated him. ... I was in desperation to know what Paul meant in this passage. At last, as I meditated day and night on the relation of the words “the righteousness of God is revealed in it, as it is written, the righteous person shall live by faith,” I began to understand that “righteousness of God” as that by which the righteous person lives by the gift of God (faith); and this sentence, “the righteousness of God is revealed,” to refer to a passive righteousness, by which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, “the righteous person lives by faith.” This immediately made me feel as though I had been born again, and as though I had entered through open gates into paradise itself. From that moment, I saw the whole face of Scripture in a new light. ... And now, where I had once hated the phrase, “the righteousness of God,” I began to love and extol it as the sweetest of phrases, so that this passage in Paul became the very gate of paradise to me.

What is Luther talking about in this famous passage, which vibrates with the excitement of discovery? It is obvious that his understanding of the

phrase “the righteousness of God” has changed radically. But what is the nature of this change?

Martin Luther (1483–1546). Perhaps the greatest figure in the European Reformation, noted particularly for his doctrine of justification by faith alone, and his strongly Christocentric understanding of revelation. His “theology of the cross” has aroused much interest in the late twentieth century. Luther’s posting of the Ninety-Five Theses in October 1517 is generally regarded as marking the beginning of the Reformation.

The basic change is fundamental. Originally Luther regarded the precondition for justification as a human work, something which the sinner had to perform, before he or she could be justified. Increasingly convinced, through his reading of Augustine, that this was an impossibility, Luther could only interpret the “righteousness of God” as a punishing righteousness. But in this passage, he narrates how he discovered a “new” meaning of the phrase – a righteousness which God gives to the sinner. In other words, God meets this precondition, graciously giving sinners what they require if they are to be justified. An analogy (not used by Luther) may help bring out the difference between these two approaches.

Let us suppose that you are in prison, and are offered your freedom on condition that you pay a heavy fine. The promise is real – so long as you can meet the precondition, the promise will be fulfilled. As we noted earlier, Pelagius works on the presupposition, initially shared by Luther, that you have the necessary money stacked away somewhere. As your freedom is worth far more, you are being offered a bargain. So you pay the fine. This presents no difficulties, so long as you have the necessary resources. Luther increasingly came to share the view of Augustine – that sinful humanity just doesn’t have the resources needed to meet this precondition. To go back to our analogy, Augustine and Luther work on the assumption that, as you don’t have the money, the promise of freedom has little relevance to your situation. For both Augustine and Luther, therefore, the good news of the gospel is that you have been given the necessary money with which to buy your freedom. In other words, the precondition has been met for you by someone else.

Luther’s insight, which he describes in this autobiographical passage, is that the God of the Christian gospel is not a harsh judge who rewards individuals according to their merits, but a merciful and gracious God who bestows righteousness upon sinners as a gift. The general consensus among

Luther scholars is that his theology of justification underwent a decisive alteration at some point in 1515.

Central to Luther's insights was the doctrine of "justification by faith alone." The idea of "justification" is already familiar. But what about the phrase "by faith alone"? What is the nature of justifying faith? "The reason why some people do not understand why faith alone justifies is that they do not know what faith is." In writing these words, Luther draws our attention to the need to inquire more closely concerning that deceptively simple word "faith." Three points relating to Luther's idea of faith may be singled out as having special importance to his doctrine of justification. Each of these points is taken up and developed by later writers, such as John Calvin, indicating that Luther has made a fundamental and widely accepted contribution to the development of Reformation thought at this point. These three points are:

1. Faith has a personal, rather than a purely historical, reference.
2. Faith concerns trust in the promises of God.
3. Faith unites the believer to Christ.

We shall consider each of these points individually.

1. First, faith is not simply historical knowledge. Luther argues that a faith which is content to believe in the historical reliability of the Gospels is not a faith which justifies. Sinners are perfectly capable of trusting in the historical details of the Gospels; but these facts of themselves are not adequate for true Christian faith. Saving faith concerns believing and trusting that Christ was born *pro nobis* – born for us personally – and has accomplished for us the work of salvation.
2. Second, faith is to be understood as "trust" (Latin: *fiducia*). The notion of trust is prominent in the Reformation conception of faith, as a nautical analogy used by Luther indicates: "Everything depends upon faith. The person who does not have faith is like someone who has to cross the sea, but is so frightened that he does not trust the ship. And so he stays where he is, and is never saved, because he will not get on board and cross over." Faith is not merely believing that something is true; it is being prepared to act upon that belief, and relying upon it. To use Luther's analogy: faith is not simply about believing that a ship exists – it is about stepping into it, and entrusting ourselves to it.

3. In the third place, faith unites the believer with Christ. Luther states this principle clearly in his writing of 1520, *The Liberty of a Christian*. Faith is not assent to an abstract set of doctrines, but is a union between Christ and the believer. It is the response of the whole person of the believer to God, which leads in turn to the real and personal presence of Christ in the believer. “To know Christ is to know his benefits,” wrote Philip Melancthon, Luther’s colleague at Wittenberg. Faith makes both Christ and his benefits – such as forgiveness, justification, and hope – available to the believer.

The doctrine of “justification by faith” thus does not mean that the sinner is justified because he or she believes, on account of that faith. This would be to treat faith as a human action or work. Luther insists that God provides everything necessary for justification, so that all that the sinner needs to do is to receive it. God is active, and humans are passive, in justification. The phrase “justification by grace through faith” brings out the meaning of the doctrine more clearly: the justification of the sinner is based upon the grace of God, and is received through faith. The doctrine of justification by faith alone is an affirmation that God does everything necessary for salvation. Even faith itself is a gift of God, rather than a human action. God meets the precondition for justification. Thus, as we saw, the “righteousness of God” is not a righteousness which judges whether or not we have met the precondition for justification, but the righteousness which is given to us so that we may meet that precondition.

One of the central insights of Luther’s doctrine of justification by faith alone is that the individual sinner is incapable of self-justification. It is God who takes the initiative in justification, providing all the resources necessary to justify that sinner. One of those resources is the “righteousness of God.” In other words, the righteousness on the basis of which the sinner is justified is not his own righteousness, but a righteousness which is given to him by God. Augustine had made this point earlier: Luther, however, gives it a subtle new twist, which leads to the development of the concept of “forensic justification.”

The point at issue is difficult to explain, and centers on the question of the location of justifying righteousness. Both Augustine and Luther are agreed that God graciously gives sinful humans a righteousness which justifies them. But where is that righteousness located? Augustine argued that it was to be found within believers; Luther insisted that it remained outside

believers. For Augustine, the righteousness in question is internal; for Luther, it is external.

For Augustine, God bestows justifying righteousness upon the sinner, in such a way that it becomes part of his or her person. As a result, this righteousness, although originating from outside the sinner, becomes part of his or her person. For Luther, the righteousness in question remains outside the sinner: it is an “alien righteousness” (*iustitia aliena*). God treats, or “reckons,” this righteousness as if it is part of the sinner’s person. In his Romans lectures of 1515–16, Luther develops the idea of the “alien righteousness of Christ,” imputed – not imparted – to us by faith, as the grounds of justification. His comments on Romans 4: 7 are especially important:

The saints are always sinners in their own sight, and therefore always justified outwardly. But the hypocrites are always righteous in their own sight, and thus always sinners outwardly. I use the term “inwardly” to show how we are in ourselves, in our own sight, in our own estimation; and the term “outwardly” to indicate how we are before God and in his reckoning. Therefore we are righteous outwardly when we are righteous solely by the imputation of God and not of ourselves or of our own works.

Believers are righteous on account of the alien righteousness of Christ, which is imputed to them – that is, treated as if it were theirs through faith. Earlier, we noted that an essential element of Luther’s concept of faith is that it unites the believer to Christ. Justifying faith thus allows the believer to link up with the righteousness of Christ, and be justified on its basis. Christians are thus “righteous by the imputation of a merciful God.”

Through faith, the believer is clothed with the righteousness of Christ, in much the same way, Luther suggests, as Ezekiel 16: 8 speaks of God covering our nakedness with his garment. For Luther, faith is the right (or righteous) relationship to God. Sin and righteousness thus coexist; we remain sinners inwardly, but are righteous extrinsically, in the sight of God. By confessing our sins in faith, we stand in a right and righteous relationship with God. From our own perspective we are sinners; but in the perspective of God, we are righteous.

Luther does not necessarily imply that this coexistence of sin and righteousness is a permanent condition. The Christian life is not static, as if

– to use a very loose way of speaking – the relative amounts of sin and righteousness remain constant throughout. Luther is perfectly aware that the Christian life is dynamic, in that the believer grows in righteousness. Rather, his point is that the existence of sin does not negate our status as Christians.

God shields our sin through his righteousness. This righteousness is like a protective covering, under which we may battle with our sin. This approach accounts for the persistence of sin in believers, while at the same time accounting for the gradual transformation of the believer and the future elimination of that sin. But it is not necessary to be perfectly righteous to be a Christian. Sin does not point to unbelief, or a failure on the part of God; rather, it points to the continued need to entrust one's person to the gentle care of God. Luther thus declares, in a famous phrase, that a believer is “at one and the same time righteous and a sinner” (*simul iustus et peccator*): righteous in hope, but a sinner in fact; righteous in the sight and through the promise of God, yet a sinner in reality.

Forensic justification: Philip Melanchthon and John Calvin

These ideas were subsequently developed by Luther's follower Philip Melanchthon to give the doctrine now generally known as “forensic justification.” Where Augustine taught that the sinner is made righteous in justification, Melanchthon taught that he is counted as righteous or pronounced to be righteous. For Augustine, “justifying righteousness” is imparted; for Melanchthon, it is imputed. Melanchthon drew a sharp distinction between the event of being declared righteous and the process of being made righteous, designating the former “justification” and the latter “sanctification” or “regeneration.” For Augustine, both were simply different aspects of the same thing. According to Melanchthon, God pronounces the divine judgment – that the sinner is righteous – in the heavenly court. This legal approach to justification gives rise to the term “forensic justification,” from the Latin word *forum* (“marketplace” or “courtyard”) – the place traditionally associated with the dispensing of justice in classical Rome.

Philip Melanchthon (1497–1560). A noted early Lutheran theologian, and close personal associate of Martin Luther. He was responsible for the systematization of early Lutheran theology, particularly through his *Loci communes* (first edition published in 1521) and his “Apology for the Augsburg Confession.”

The importance of this development lies in the fact that it marks a complete break with the teaching of the church up to that point. From the time of Augustine onward, justification had always been understood to refer to both the event of being declared righteous and the process of being made righteous. Melanchthon’s concept of forensic justification diverged radically from this. As it was taken up by virtually all the major reformers subsequently, it came to represent a standard difference between Protestant and Roman Catholic from that point onward. In addition to their differences on how the sinner was justified, there was now an additional disagreement on what the word “justification” designated in the first place. As we shall see, the Council of Trent, the Roman Catholic church’s definitive response to the Protestant challenge, reaffirmed the views of Augustine on the nature of justification, and censured the views of Melanchthon.

Melanchthon’s understanding of justification as the event of God declaring someone to be righteous – and to be distinguished sharply from sanctification, the process by which God makes someone righteous – became widely accepted in Protestantism. Calvin’s formulation of the concept of justification is widely regarded as definitive, and merits close study:

To be justified in God’s sight is to be reckoned as righteous in God’s judgment, and to be accepted on account of that righteousness. ... The person who is justified by faith is someone who, apart from the righteousness of works, has taken hold of the righteousness of Christ through faith, and having been clothed with it, appears in the sight of God not as a sinner, but as a righteous person. Therefore justification is to be understood simply as the acceptance by which God receives us into his favor as righteous people. We say that it consists of the remission of sins and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ. ... There is no doubt that we obtain justification in the sight of God only by the intercession of the righteousness of Christ. This is equivalent to saying that believers are not righteous in themselves, but on account of the communication of the righteousness of Christ through imputation, something to be noted carefully. ... Our righteousness is not in us, but

in Christ. We possess it only because we participate in Christ; in fact, with him, we possess all his riches.

Justification is here defined *forensically* as being “reckoned as righteous” in the judgment of God. It defines the beginning of the Christian life, in which the believer enters into a right relation with God. The concept of the “imputation of the righteousness of Christ” plays a central role in this approach. For Calvin, the righteousness that God requires in justification is not achieved internally by human beings through good works, but externally, through the “imputation” or “reckoning” of the righteousness of Christ to the believer. The Christian life is subsequently defined in terms of sanctification, which concerns growth in holiness. For Augustine, in contrast, “justification” means *both* the beginnings of the Christian life *and* the ongoing process of “being made righteous” – an understanding which is developed by the Council of Trent, to which we now turn.

The Council of Trent

It was obvious that the church needed to make an official and definitive response to Luther. By 1540, Luther had become something of a household name throughout Europe. His writings were being read and digested with various degrees of enthusiasm, even in the highest ecclesiastical circles in Italy. Something had to be done. The Council of Trent, summoned in 1545, began the long process of formulating a comprehensive response to Luther. High on its agenda was the doctrine of justification.

The sixth session of the Council of Trent was brought to its close on January 13, 1547. The Tridentine Decree on Justification, as the substantial product of this session has generally come to be known, probably represents the most significant achievement of this council. Its 16 chapters set out the Roman Catholic teaching on justification with a considerable degree of clarity. A series of 33 canons condemn specific opinions attributed to opponents of the Roman Catholic church, including Luther. Interestingly, the council seems unaware of the threat posed by Calvin, and directs the vast bulk of its criticisms against views which were known to be held by Luther himself.

Trent’s critique of Luther’s doctrine of justification can be broken down into four main sections:

1. The nature of justification.

2. The nature of justifying righteousness.
3. The nature of justifying faith.
4. The assurance of salvation.

We shall consider each of these four matters individually.

1. *The nature of justification* In his earlier phase, around the years 1515–19, Luther tended to understand justification as a process of becoming, in which the sinner was gradually conformed to the likeness of Jesus Christ through a process of internal renewal. Luther’s analogy of a sick person under competent medical care points to this understanding of justification, as does his famous declaration in the 1515–16 Romans lectures, “justification is about becoming.” In his later writings, however, dating from the mid-1530s and beyond, perhaps under the influence of Melanchthon’s more forensic approach to justification (see pp. 157–9), Luther tended to treat justification as a matter of being declared to be righteous, rather than a process of becoming righteous. Increasingly, he came to see justification as an event, which was complemented by the distinct process of regeneration and interior renewal through the action of the Holy Spirit. Justification alters the outer status of the sinner in the sight of God, while regeneration alters the sinner’s inner nature.

The Council of Trent. A major gathering of Catholic bishops and theologians, which aimed to reform the church in the face of Protestant criticisms, and clarify and defend Catholic doctrine. The sixth session, focusing on the doctrine of justification, concluded in 1547; the thirteenth session, dealing with the real presence, ended in 1551.

Trent strongly opposes this view, and vigorously defends the idea, originally associated with Augustine of Hippo, that justification is the process of regeneration and renewal within human nature, which brings about a change in both the outer status and inner nature of the sinner. Its fourth chapter provides the following precise definition of justification:

The justification of the sinner may be briefly defined as a translation from that state in which a human being is born a child of the first Adam, to the state of grace and of the adoption of the sons of God through the second Adam, Jesus Christ our Savior. According to the gospel, this translation cannot come about except through the cleansing of regeneration, or a desire for this, as it is written, “Unless someone is

born again of water and the Holy Spirit, he or she cannot enter into the Kingdom of God” (John 3: 5).

Justification thus includes the idea of regeneration. This brief statement is amplified in the seventh chapter, which stresses that justification “is not only a remission of sins but also the sanctification and renewal of the inner person through the voluntary reception of the grace and gifts by which an unrighteous person becomes a righteous person.” This point was given further emphasis through canon 11, which condemned anyone who taught that justification takes place “either by the sole imputation of the righteousness of Christ or by the sole remission of sins, to the exclusion of grace and charity ... or that the grace by which we are justified is only the goodwill of God.”

For Trent, justification is closely linked with the sacraments of baptism and penance. The sinner is initially justified through baptism; however, on account of sin, that justification may be forfeited. It can, however, be renewed by penance, as the fourteenth chapter makes clear:

Those who through sin have forfeited the received grace of justification can be justified again when, moved by God, they exert themselves to obtain through the sacrament of penance the recovery, by the merits of Christ, of the grace which was lost. Now this manner of justification is restoration for those who have lapsed into sin. The holy fathers have properly called this a “second plank after the shipwreck of lost grace.”

Briefly, then, Trent maintains the medieval tradition, stretching back to Augustine, which saw justification as comprising both an event and a process – the event of being declared to be righteous through the work of Christ, and the process of being made righteous through the internal work of the Holy Spirit. Reformers such as Melancthon and Calvin distinguished these two matters, treating the word “justification” as referring only to the process of being declared to be righteous; the accompanying process of internal renewal, which they termed “sanctification” or “regeneration,” they regarded as theologically distinct.

Serious confusion thus resulted: Roman Catholics and Protestants both used the same word “justification” to mean very different things. Trent used the term “justification” to mean what, to Protestants, was both justification and sanctification.

2. *The nature of justifying righteousness* Luther placed emphasis upon the fact that sinners possessed no righteousness in themselves. They had nothing within them which could ever be regarded as the basis of God's gracious decision to justify them. Luther's doctrine of the "alien righteousness of Christ" (*iustitia Christi aliena*) made it clear that the righteousness which justified sinners was outside them. It was imputed, not imparted; external, not internal.

Early critics of the Reformation argued, following Augustine of Hippo, that sinners were justified on the basis of an internal righteousness, graciously infused or implanted within their persons by God. This righteousness was itself given as an act of grace; it was not something merited. But, they argued, there had to be something within individuals which could allow God to justify them. Luther dismissed this idea. If God had decided to justify someone, he might as well do it directly, rather than through an intermediate gift of righteousness.

Trent strongly defended the Augustinian idea of justification on the basis of an internal righteousness. The seventh chapter makes this point crystal clear:

The single formal cause (of justification) is the righteousness of God – not the righteousness by which he himself is righteous, but the righteousness by which he makes us righteous, so that, when we are endowed with it, we are "renewed in the spirit of our mind" (Ephesians 4: 23), and are not only counted as righteous, but are called, and are in reality, righteous. ... Nobody can be righteous except God communicates the merits of the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ to him or her, and this takes place in the justification of the sinner.

The phrase "single formal cause" needs explanation. A "formal" cause is the direct, or most immediate, cause of something. Trent is thus stating that the direct cause of justification is the righteousness which God graciously imparts to us – as opposed to more distant causes of justification, such as the "efficient cause" (God), or the "meritorious cause" (Jesus Christ). But the use of the word "single" should also be noted. One proposal for reaching agreement between Roman Catholic and Protestant, which gained especial prominence at the Colloquy of Ratisbon in 1541, was that two causes of justification should be recognized – an external righteousness (the Protestant position) and an internal righteousness (the Roman Catholic position). This compromise seemed to hold some potential. Trent, however,

had no time for it. The use of the word “single” was deliberate, intended to eliminate the idea that there could be more than one such cause. The only direct cause of justification was the interior gift of righteousness.

3.The nature of justifying faith Luther’s doctrine of justification by faith alone came in for severe criticism. Canon 12 condemns a central aspect of Luther’s notion of justifying faith, when it rejects the idea that “justifying faith is nothing other than confidence in the mercy of God, which remits sin for the sake of Christ.” In part, this rejection of Luther’s doctrine of justification reflects the ambiguity, noted above, concerning the meaning of the term “justification.” Trent was alarmed that anyone should believe that they could be justified – in the Tridentine sense of the term – by faith, without any need for obedience or spiritual renewal. Trent, interpreting “justification” to mean both the beginning of the Christian life and its continuation and growth, believed that Luther was suggesting that simply trusting in God (without any requirement that the sinner be changed and renewed by God) was the basis of the entire Christian life.

In fact, Luther meant nothing of the sort. He was affirming that the Christian life was begun through faith, and faith alone; good works followed justification, and did not cause that justification in the first place. Trent itself was perfectly prepared to concede that the Christian life was begun through faith, thus coming very close indeed to Luther’s position. As chapter 8 of the Decree on Justification declares, “we are said to be justified by faith, because faith is the beginning of human salvation, the foundation and root of all justification, without which is it impossible to please God.” This is perhaps a classic case of a theological misunderstanding, resting upon the disputed meaning of a major theological term.

4.The assurance of salvation For Luther, as for the reformers in general, one could rest assured of one’s salvation. Salvation was grounded upon the faithfulness of God to his promises of mercy; to fail to have confidence in salvation was, in effect, to doubt the reliability and trustworthiness of God. Yet this must not be seen as a supreme confidence in God, untroubled by doubt. Faith is not the same as certainty; although the theological foundation of Christian faith may be secure, the human perception of and commitment to this foundation may waver.

This point is brought out clearly by Calvin, often thought to be the most confident of all the reformers in relation to matters of faith. His definition of faith certainly seems to point in this direction:

Now we shall have a right definition of faith if we say that it is a steady and certain knowledge of the divine benevolence towards us, which is founded upon the truth of the gracious promise of God in Christ, and is both revealed to our minds and sealed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.

Yet the theological certainty of this statement does not, according to Calvin, necessarily lead to psychological security. It is perfectly consistent with a sustained wrestling with doubt and anxiety on the part of the believer:

When we stress that faith ought to be certain and secure, we do not have in mind a certainty without doubt, or a security without any anxiety. Rather, we affirm that believers have a perpetual struggle with their own lack of faith, and are far from possessing a peaceful conscience, never interrupted by any disturbance. On the other hand, we want to deny that they may fall out of, or depart from, their confidence in the divine mercy, no matter how much they may be troubled.

The Council of Trent regarded the reformers' doctrine of assurance with considerable skepticism. Chapter 9 of the Decree on Justification, entitled "Against the vain confidence of heretics," criticized the "ungodly confidence" of the reformers. While no one should doubt God's goodness and generosity, the reformers erred seriously when they taught that "nobody is absolved from sins and justified, unless they believe with certainty that they are absolved and justified, and that absolution and justification are effected by this faith alone." Trent insisted that "nobody can know with a certainty of faith which is not subject to error, whether they have obtained the grace of God."

Trent's point is that the reformers seemed to be making human confidence or boldness the grounds of justification, so that justification rested upon a fallible human conviction, rather than upon the grace of God. The reformers, however, saw themselves as stressing that justification rested upon the promises of God; a failure to believe boldly in such promises was tantamount to calling the reliability of God into question.

The debate between Trent and the Reformation remains significant, as recent ecumenical dialogues between various Protestant denominations and

the Roman Catholic church make clear. The same could be said of the Reformation debates over the sacraments, to one of which we now turn.

Case study 3.3 The nature of the real presence: Luther, Zwingli, and the Council of Trent

What happens at the eucharist? In what way do the eucharistic bread and wine change, if at all, as a result of being used in this service? A number of approaches to the question were explored during the sixteenth century, of which three are of especial importance. We shall explore them individually, beginning with the traditional Catholic concept of transubstantiation, which affirms that the inward reality of the eucharistic bread and wine are transformed into the body and blood of Christ.

Transubstantiation: the Council of Trent

The doctrine of transubstantiation, formally defined by the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), rests upon Aristotelian foundations – specifically, on Aristotle’s distinction between “substance” and “accident.” The substance of something is its essential nature, whereas its accidents are its outward appearances (for example, its color, shape, smell, and so forth). The theory of transubstantiation affirms that the accidents of the bread and wine remain unchanged at the moment of consecration, while their substance changes from that of bread and wine to that of the body and blood of Christ.

As we shall see, this understanding of the nature of the real presence was contested during the early sixteenth century. Martin Luther put forward an approach, often referred to as “consubstantiation,” which differed from this view at points (although there are significant similarities, as we shall see). More radically, Huldrych Zwingli adopted a purely symbolic or “memorialist” approach to the issue. The traditional viewpoint was, however, vigorously defended by the Council of Trent.

During the course of its thirteenth session, which ended on October 11, 1551, the Council of Trent set out a definitive statement on its understanding of the nature of the real presence of Christ in the eucharist, affirming that the term “transubstantiation” was appropriate to refer to the change in the substance of the bread and wine resulting from their consecration. The Decree opens with a vigorous affirmation of the real

substantial presence of Christ: “After the consecration of the bread and wine, our Lord Jesus Christ is truly, really and substantially contained in the venerable sacrament of the holy eucharist under the appearance of those physical things.” The Council thus vigorously defended both the doctrine and the terminology of transubstantiation:

Because Christ our Redeemer declared that it was truly his body that he was offering under the species of bread, it has always been the belief of the Church of God, which this sacred council reaffirms, that by the consecration of the bread and wine a change takes place in which the entire substance of the bread becomes the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and the whole substance of the wine becomes the substance of his blood. This change the holy Catholic Church has fittingly and correctly called “transubstantiation.”

Note especially the vigorous defense of the change of the substance of the bread and wine into that of the body and blood of Christ, which can be regarded as the real theological heart of this doctrine.

Luther: consubstantiation

This view, especially associated with Martin Luther, insists upon the simultaneous presence of both bread and the body of Christ at one and the same time. There is no change in substance; the substance of both bread and the body of Christ are present together. The doctrine of transubstantiation seemed to Luther to be an absurdity, an attempt to rationalize a mystery. For Luther, the crucial point was that Christ was really present at the eucharist – not some particular theory as to how he was present. He deploys an image borrowed from Origen to make his point: if iron is placed in a fire and heated, it glows – and in that glowing iron, both the iron and heat are present. Why not use some simple everyday analogy such as this to illustrate the mystery of the presence of Christ at the eucharist, instead of rationalizing it using some scholastic subtlety?

For my part, if I cannot fathom how the bread is the body of Christ, yet I will take my reason captive to the obedience of Christ, and clinging simply to his words, firmly believe not only that the body of Christ is in the bread, but that the bread is the body of Christ. My warrant for this is the words which say: “He took bread, and when he had given thanks, he

broke it and said, Take, eat, this [that is, this bread, which he had taken and broken] is my body” (1 Corinthians 11: 23–4).

It is not the doctrine of transubstantiation which is to be believed, but simply that Christ really is present at the eucharist. This fact is more important than any theory or explanation.

These points can be seen clearly from his 1520 treatise *The Babylonian Captivity of the Church*, in which Luther set out a fundamental criticism of the teachings of the medieval church concerning the sacraments, and in which he argues that the concept of “transubstantiation” is untenable. Although Luther maintains a doctrine of the real presence of Christ in the eucharist, he refuses to accept the specifically Aristotelian interpretation of it associated with transubstantiation:

For more than twelve hundred years the church believed rightly, during which time the holy fathers never, at any time or place, mentioned this “transubstantiation” (a pretentious word and idea) until the pseudo-philosophy of Aristotle began to make its inroads into the church in these last three hundred years, in which many things have been incorrectly defined, as for example, that the divine essence is neither begotten nor begets; or that the soul is the substantial form of the human body. ... But why could not Christ include his body in the substance of the bread just as well as in the accidents? In red-hot iron, for example, the two substances, fire and iron, are so mingled that every part is both iron and fire. Why should it not be even more possible that the glorious body of Christ be contained in every part of the substance of the bread? ... What is true concerning Christ is also true concerning the sacrament. In order for the divinity to dwell in a human body, it is not necessary for the human nature to be transubstantiated and the divinity contained under the accidents of the human nature. Both natures are simply there in their entirety.

Zwingli: memorialism

The background to Zwingli’s views on the real presence of Christ can be traced back to some seemingly insignificant events of the year 1509. In November of that year, a change of personnel at a small library in the Lowlands took place, necessitating the cataloguing of its holdings. The work was entrusted to Cornelius Hoen, who discovered that the library

contained a significant collection of the writings of the noted humanist Wessel Gansfort (c.1420–89). One of these was entitled *On the Sacrament of the Eucharist*. Although Gansfort did not actually deny the doctrine of transubstantiation, he developed the idea of a spiritual communion between Christ and the believer. Hoen, apparently attracted by this idea, reworked it into a radical critique of the doctrine of transubstantiation, which he wrote up in the form of a letter. It seems that this letter found its way to Luther at some point in 1521 (although the evidence is not entirely conclusive). By 1523, the letter had reached Zurich, where it was read by Zwingli.

In this letter, Hoen suggested that the word *est* in *hoc est corpus meum* should not be interpreted literally as “is” or “is identical with,” but rather as *significat*, “signifies.” For example, when Christ says “I am the bread of life” (John 6: 48), he is clearly not identifying himself with a loaf of bread or bread in general. The word “is” here must be taken in a metaphorical, or non-literal, sense. The Old Testament prophets may indeed have foretold that Christ would “become flesh” (*incarnatus*) – but this was to happen once, and only once. “At no point did the prophets foretell or the apostles preach that Christ would, so to speak, become bread [*impanatus*] every day through the actions of any priest offering the sacrifice of the Mass.”

Hoen developed a number of ideas which eventually found their way into the eucharistic thought of Zwingli. Two may be noted here. The first is the idea of the eucharist being like a ring given by a groom to his bride to reassure her of his love. It is a *pledge* – an idea that resonates throughout Zwingli’s writings on the subject. Zwingli deploys the imagery of a ring as a pledge of love with considerable skill at a number of points, and it is not impossible that it was Hoen who planted this powerful image in his mind. The second notion that Hoen employs is that of commemoration of Christ in his absence. Noting that Christ’s phrase “this is my body” is immediately followed by the words “Do this in remembrance of me,” Hoen argues that the second set of words clearly points to commemoration of “a person who is absent (at least, physically absent).”

Where Luther reacted with a notable lack of enthusiasm to Hoen’s ideas, Zwingli was considerably more positive in his reaction. By November and December of 1524 he was promoting Hoen’s ideas with some vigor, and the following year he arranged for the letter to be published. In the summer of 1525, the learned Oecolampadius of Basle joined in the discussion, producing a book in which he argued that the writers of the patristic period

knew nothing of either transubstantiation or Luther's views on the real presence, but tended toward the view now increasingly being associated with Zwingli.

Zwingli argued that Scripture employed many figures of speech. Thus the word "is" might at one point mean "is absolutely identical with," and at another mean "represents" or "signifies." For example, in his treatise *On the Lord's Supper* (1526), he wrote:

Throughout the Bible, we find figures of speech, called in the Greek *tropos*, that is, something that is metaphorical, or to be understood in another sense. For example, in John 15 Christ says "I am the vine." This means that Christ is like a vine when considered in relation to us, who are sustained and grow in him in the same way as branches grow on a vine. ... Similarly, in John 1 we read "Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world." The first part of this verse is a figure of speech, for Christ is not literally a lamb.

After a detailed exploration of relevant biblical texts, Zwingli concluded that "there are innumerable passages in Scripture where the word 'is' means 'signifies.' " He therefore argues that this is also true for Christ's words in Matthew 26, "this is my body," which is meant to be taken metaphorically or *in tropice*.

A further argument used by Zwingli against Luther's position concerns the location of the risen Christ. For Luther, Christ is present in the eucharist. Whoever receives the bread and the wine receives Christ. Zwingli, however, pointed out that both Scripture and the creeds affirm that Christ is now "seated at the right hand of God." Now Zwingli had not the slightest idea where this might be, and wasted no time speculating on its location – but, he argued, it did mean that wherever Christ is now, it isn't in the eucharist. He can't be in two places at once.

From this brief analysis, it will be clear that there were substantial disagreements within Christianity during the sixteenth century over this important issue, which remain to this day. This same conclusion is also true over the question of infant baptism, to which we now turn. This proved to be especially contentious within Protestantism, and became a major cause of division in the 1530s.

Case study 3.4 The debate over infant baptism

One important controversy of the Reformation era concerned whether it is legitimate to baptize infants – and if so, what theological justification may be provided for the practice. The New Testament includes no specific references to the baptism of infants. However, it does not explicitly forbid the practice, and there are also a number of passages (such as Acts 16: 15, 33; 1 Corinthians 1: 16) which could be interpreted as condoning or implying it – for example, references to the baptizing of entire households (which would probably have included infants). Paul treats baptism as a spiritual counterpart to circumcision (Colossians 2: 11–12), suggesting that the parallel may extend to its application to infants.

The practice of baptizing infants of Christian parents – often referred to as “paedobaptism” – appears to have been a response to a number of pressures. It is possible that the parallel with the Jewish rite of circumcision led Christians to devise an equivalent rite of passage for Christian infants. More generally, there seems to have been a pastoral need for Christian parents to celebrate the birth of a child within a believing household. Infant baptism may well have had its origins partly in response to this concern. However, it must be stressed that there is genuine uncertainty concerning both the historical origins and the social or theological causes of the practice. What can be said is that the practice had become normal, if not universal, by the second or third century. But is it a tradition that ought to be continued?

As we shall see, the Anabaptists argued that this practice represented a distortion of the Bible. At no point did the New Testament explicitly endorse or require infant baptism. If the church was to reform itself properly according to the Word of God, it ought to abandon this practice, and only baptize consenting adults. Baptism presupposes faith on the part of an individual. How, then, can an infant be baptized? We shall consider Anabaptist concerns about this practice later in this case study.

Martin Luther

In common with all the magisterial reformers, Luther retained the traditional practice of infant baptism. Luther argued that the early church was right to baptize infants, in that this rests on a sound biblical foundation. Infant baptism is clearly consistent with the New Testament. But what about the argument that baptism requires faith? Luther insists that the emphasis in baptism falls not on the faith or worthiness of the one being baptized, but on the grace and generosity of the one who bestows grace, and commands that we are baptized:

Everything depends upon the Word and command of God. This now is perhaps somewhat acute but it rests entirely upon what I have said, that Baptism is nothing else than water and the Word of God in and with each other – that is when the Word is added to the water, Baptism is valid, even though faith be wanting.

It might be thought that Luther's doctrine of justification by faith alone contradicts this practice. After all, infants could not meaningfully be said to have faith, if faith is understood as a conscious, deliberate response to the promises of God. It must be pointed out, however, that Luther's doctrine of justification by faith does not mean that the individual who has faith is justified for that reason: rather, it means that God graciously gives faith as a gift. In a paradoxical way, infant baptism is totally consistent with the doctrine of justification by faith, because it emphasizes that faith is not something we can achieve, but something which is given to us graciously.

For Luther, the sacraments do not merely strengthen the faith of believers – they are capable of generating that faith in the first place. The sacrament mediates the Word of God, which is capable of evoking faith. Thus Luther finds no difficulty with the practice of infant baptism. Baptism does not presuppose faith: rather, it generates faith. "A child becomes a believer if Christ in baptism speaks to him through the mouth of the one who baptizes, since it is his Word, his commandment, and his Word cannot be without fruit." Baptism effects what it signifies:

So we can see what a great and excellent thing Baptism is, in that it delivers us from the jaws of the devil and makes us God's own, suppresses and takes away sin, and then daily strengthens the new person, and is (and will always remain) efficacious until we pass from this state of misery to eternal glory.

Huldrych Zwingli

Zwingli also defended infant baptism, but for quite different reasons. How, it was argued, could he justify baptizing infants, when these had no faith which they could publicly demonstrate? The traditional answer to this dilemma rested with original sin. Baptism purged the guilt of original sin. The argument in question went back to Augustine in the early fifth century, and was used by Luther in his defense of the practice of infant baptism.

Yet Zwingli had hesitations here. Following Erasmus, he had difficulties with the notion of original sin, and inclined toward the view that infants had no inherent original sinfulness which needed to be forgiven. As a result, infant baptism seemed to serve no purpose – unless another theoretical justification for the practice were forthcoming. Zwingli had no difficulty in the idea of individuals committing sins. His problem lay with the notion of a state of original sin, which he regarded as an unbiblical idea.

It is clear that Zwingli had misgivings in the late 1510s and early 1520s about continuing the practice of infant baptism in the light of his rejection of the notion of original sin. By 1524, however, he appears to have developed a theory of baptism which got round this difficulty altogether. Zwingli pointed out that in the Old Testament infant males were circumcised within days of their birth as a sign of their membership of the people of Israel. Circumcision was the rite laid down by the Old Testament covenant to demonstrate that the circumcised child belonged to the covenant community. The child had been born into a community, to which it now belonged – and circumcision was a sign of belonging to this community.

There had been a long-standing tradition within Christian theology of seeing baptism as the Christian equivalent of circumcision. Zwingli developed this idea, pointing out that baptism is gentler than circumcision, in that it involves no pain or shedding of blood, and more inclusive, in that it embraces both male and female infants. It too was a sign of belonging to a community – in this case, the Christian church. The fact that the child was not conscious of this belonging was irrelevant: it was a member of the Christian community, and baptism was the public demonstration of this membership. The contrast with Luther on this point will be obvious.

Zwingli subsequently took this argument a stage further. Beginning with the assumption that “Baptism is a sign which pledges us to the Lord Jesus

Christ,” Zwingli then argues that to be a Christian is to be a loyal citizen of the city of Zurich. Cities were seen as organic communities in the late Middle Ages, a factor which appears to have been significant for many cities as they considered whether to accept the Reformation. This same view appears in Zwingli, who treats “state” and “church” as virtually equivalent: “A Christian city is nothing other than a Christian church.” The sacraments thus signified not merely loyalty to the church, but also loyalty to the city community, in this case Zurich. To refuse to allow one’s child to be baptized, therefore, was an act of disloyalty to the Zurich city community. The magistrates were thus entitled to expel from Zurich all who refused to allow their children to be baptized. Baptism had become politicized. And the target of Zwingli’s understanding of infant baptism was the Anabaptists, who he sought to portray as politically seditious and unreliable.

Anabaptism: Menno Simons

The Anabaptists, as we have seen, regarded infant baptism as unjustifiable. As the radical Reformation posed a major threat to the Reformation at Zurich in the 1520s, on account of both its religious and political views, Zwingli’s understanding of baptism as both an ecclesial and a civic event provided an excellent means of enforcing conformity.

Baptism thus became of central importance to Zwingli, in that it provided a criterion by which two totally different concepts of the church might be distinguished. Zwingli’s concept of a state or city church was increasingly challenged by the Anabaptists, whose vision of the church involved a return to the simplicities of the apostolic church. For the radicals, the purity of that church had been totally destroyed through the conversion of the Roman emperor Constantine in the early fourth century, which had led to a close alliance of church and state. The Anabaptists wished to sever this link, whereas Zwingli wished to continue it in the specific form found at Zurich. Thus Zwingli felt justified in declaring that “the issue is not baptism, but revolt, faction and heresy.” Baptism represented the criterion that determined whether an individual was a loyal citizen of Zurich or a traitor to that city. This point reminds us of how closely theology and politics, church and city, were linked in the first era of the Reformation.

As has been hinted at throughout this case study, the theory and practice of infant baptism was rejected totally by the Anabaptists, who were on the more radical wing of the Reformation. Indeed, one of the most distinctive theological characteristics of the Anabaptist movement was its rejection of the traditional practice of infant baptism. The main reason for this was its lack of biblical warrant. Menno Simons (1496–1561) argued that the practice of infant baptism was a non-biblical tradition, which ought to be abandoned by all concerned with returning to a more authentic apostolic Christianity. “In all the New Testament there is not a word said or commanded about baptizing infants, by Christ nor by the apostles.”

Yet the Anabaptist critique of the practice of infant baptism went beyond its lack of biblical warrant. As we noted earlier, Anabaptist writers argued that the New Testament clearly presupposed that those who were to be baptized possessed faith. As Simons argued, Christ “commanded that the gospel should be preached and that those who believe should be baptized.” It was, he insisted, a distortion of the true faith to allow infants to be baptized, since these showed no signs of faith, knowledge of the truth, or inner regeneration.

Most Anabaptist writers held that baptism was a ceremony or rite which was performed in recognition that an individual showed clear signs of faith, repentance, and regeneration. This general principle, and its consequences for infant baptism, is clearly set out in the Schleithem Confession (1527), one of the most important Anabaptist confessions of faith:

Baptism shall be given to all those who have learned repentance and amendment of life, and who believe truly that their sins are taken away by Christ, and to all those who walk in the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and wish to be buried with Him in death, so that they may be raised with him. ... This excludes all infant baptism, the highest and chief abomination of the Pope.

Baptism is thus clearly seen as an outward physical sign of an inward spiritual reality, which it signifies but does not cause. As Simons pointed out, “we are baptized because we are regenerated by faith in God’s word, since regeneration is not the result of baptism, but baptism is the result of regeneration.” Infant baptism was thus clearly inconsistent with this general theology of baptism. Simons, however, was clear that his rejection of infant baptism did not entail excluding children from the Kingdom of God.

Baptism was a sign, not the cause, of such membership. “Christ has promised the kingdom to little children without baptism.”

This theology of baptism is completely consistent with Anabaptist ecclesiology, which is generally **Donatist** in character. The practice of believers’ baptism defines and ensures a believers’ church. As Balthasar Hubmaier put it, “no baptism, no church; no baptism, no discipleship.” Baptism defined the point of entry to full membership of the church, representing a public declaration that an individual was considered to possess those characteristics deemed necessary for admittance.

A movement, centering upon Roman North Africa in the fourth century, which developed a rigorist view of the church and sacraments.

Case study 3.5 The doctrine of the church: Trends within Protestantism

The Reformation arose within an intellectual context which placed new emphasis upon the importance of Augustine, the great Christian writer of the late fourth and early fifth centuries, reflected in the publication of the Amerbach edition of Augustine's works in 1506. In many ways, however, the reformers' views on the church represent their Achilles' heel. They were confronted with two consistent rival views of the church the logic of which they could not match – those of their opponents within the Catholic and radical Reformations. For the former, the church was a visible, historic institution, possessing historical continuity with the apostolic church; for the latter, the true church was in heaven, and no institution of any kind on earth merited the name “church of God.” The magisterial reformers attempted to claim the middle ground somewhere between these two rival views, and found themselves involved in serious inconsistencies as a result. In the present case study, we will explore the various views on the doctrine of the church found within the Protestant Reformation, noting the remarkable parallels that exist with the Donatist controversy (on which see case study 1.6).

Luther was convinced that the church of their day and age had lost sight of the doctrine of grace, which Luther regarded as the center of the Christian gospel. Convinced that the Catholic church had lost sight of this doctrine, he concluded (with some reluctance, it would seem) that it had lost its claim to be considered as the authentic Christian church. The Catholics responded to this suggestion with derision: Luther was simply creating a breakaway faction which had no connection with the church. In other words, he was a schismatic – and had not Augustine himself condemned schism? Had not he placed enormous emphasis upon the unity of the church, which Luther now threatened to disrupt? Here we can see an important historical reference point, which would play a major role in sixteenth-century debates over the church: the Reformation can, at least in some respects, be seen as a replay of the Donatist controversy of the fourth century.

Luther, it seemed, could only uphold Augustine's doctrine of grace by rejecting Augustine's doctrine of the church. "The Reformation, inwardly considered, was just the ultimate triumph of Augustine's doctrine of grace over Augustine's doctrine of the church" (Benjamin B. Warfield). It is in the context of this tension between two aspects of Augustine's thought, which proved to be incompatible in the sixteenth century, that the Reformation understandings of the nature of the church are to be seen.

Luther was a reluctant schismatic. In his period as an academic reformer, Luther shared a profound distaste for schism. Even the row over the Ninety-Five Theses on indulgences of October 31, 1517 did not persuade Luther to break away from the church. In the twentieth century, we have become used to the phenomenon of "denominationalism" – but the very idea of the western church breaking up into smaller parts was completely alien to the medieval period. Schism, to put it bluntly, was unthinkable. As Luther himself wrote in early 1519: "If, unfortunately, there are things in Rome which cannot be improved, there is not – and cannot be – any reason for tearing oneself away from the church in schism. Rather, the worse things become, the more one should help her and stand by her, for by schism and contempt nothing can be mended." Luther's views here parallel those of other reforming groups throughout Europe: the church must be reformed from within.

The assumption that the growing alienation of the Wittenberg Reformation from the Catholic church was purely temporary seems to underlie much of the thinking of Lutheran writers in the period 1520–41. It seems that the evangelical faction at Wittenberg believed that the Catholic church would indeed reform itself, perhaps through convening a reforming council, within a matter of years, thus allowing the Lutherans to rejoin a renewed and reformed church. Thus the Augsburg Confession (1530), setting out the main lines of Lutheran belief, is actually remarkably conciliatory toward Catholicism. Such hopes of reunion were, however, dashed in the 1540s. In 1541, the Colloquy of Regensburg (sometimes also known as Ratisbon) seemed to offer the hope of reconciliation, as a group of Protestant and Catholic theologians met to discuss their differences. Those discussions ended in failure.

In 1545, the Council of Trent finally met to hammer out the response of the Catholic church to the Reformation and institute a major program of reform within that church. Some present at that Council, such as Cardinal

Reginald Pole, had hoped that it would prove to be conciliatory toward the Protestants: in the event, however, the Council identified and condemned the leading ideas of Protestantism. Any hopes of reconciliation had been dashed. The Protestant churches now had to recognize that their existence as separate entities was permanent, rather than temporary. They had to justify their existence as Christian “churches” alongside a body which seemed to have a much stronger claim to that title – the Roman Catholic church itself.

On the basis of this brief historical introduction, it will be obvious that the reformers’ concern with the theory of the church dates mainly from the 1540s. It is a question which preoccupied the second, rather than the first, generation of reformers. If Luther was concerned with the question, “How may I find a gracious God?,” his successors were obliged to deal with the question which arose out of this – “Where can I find the true church?” Theoretical justification had to be given for the separate existence of the evangelical churches. Most influential among second-generation reformers, of course, is John Calvin, and it is in his writings that we find perhaps the most important contributions to this debate. In what follows, we shall explore some seminal sixteenth-century discussions of the nature of the church.

Martin Luther

As we have seen, the early reformers were convinced that the medieval church had become corrupted and its doctrine distorted by a departure from Scripture, on the one hand, and by human additions to Scripture, on the other. Luther’s early views on the nature of the church reflect his emphasis on the Word of God: the Word of God goes forth conquering, and wherever it conquers and gains true obedience to God is the church:

This holy Christian people is to be recognized as having possession of the holy word of God, even if all do not possess it in equal measure, as St Paul says (1 Corinthians 3: 12–14). Some possess it completely purely, others not so purely. ... But we are speaking of the external word, preached orally by people like you and me, for this is what Christ left behind as an external sign, by which his church, or his Christian people in the world, should be recognized. ... Now, anywhere you hear or see such a word preached, believed, confessed, and acted upon, do

not doubt that the true *ecclesia sancta catholica*, a “holy Christian people” must be there, even though there are very few of them.

Note that Luther’s views here stress the central role of the word of God in constituting a true church. An episcopally ordained ministry is therefore not necessary to safeguard the existence of the church, whereas the preaching of the gospel is essential to the identity of that church. “Where the word is, there is faith; and where faith is, there is the true church.” The visible church is constituted by the preaching of the Word of God: no human assembly may claim to be the “church of God” unless it is founded on this gospel. Historical continuity with the early church is not sufficient to establish its credentials in this matter. Luther’s understanding of the church is thus functional, rather than historical: what legitimates a church or its office bearers is not historical continuity with the apostolic church, but theological continuity. It is more important to preach the same gospel as the apostles than to be a member of an institution which is historically derived from them.

The radical Reformation

For the radicals, such as Sebastian Franck, the apostolic church had been totally compromised through its close links with the state, dating back to the conversion of the emperor Constantine. Franck here sets out the characteristic radical view that the true church ceased to exist after the apostles. His frequent reference to “external things” (*externa*) is a reference to external ceremonies, including the sacraments, which he regards as being “fallen” (*lapsus*). The true church will only come into being at the end of time, when Christ returns in glory to gather the scattered people of his church into his kingdom. Until then, the true church will remain concealed:

I maintain, against all the doctors, that all external things which were in use in the church of the apostles have been abolished, and none of them are to be restored or reinstituted, even though they have gone beyond their authorization or calling and attempted to restore these fallen sacraments. For the church will remain scattered among the heathen until the end of the world. Indeed, the Antichrist and his church will only be defeated and swept away at the coming of Christ, who will gather together in his kingdom Israel, which has been scattered to the four corners of the world. ... The works [of those who understood this]

have been suppressed as godless heresies and rantings, and pride of place has instead been given to foolish Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome, Gregory – of whom not even one knew Christ, nor was sent by God to teach. But rather all were and shall remain the apostles of Antichrist.

Just as most of the radicals were utterly consistent in their application of the *sola scriptura* principle, so they were equally consistent in their views on the institutional church. The true church was in heaven, and its institutional parodies were on earth.

In responding to this radical approach Luther was forced to deal with two difficulties. If the church was not institutional, but was defined by the preaching of the gospel, how could he distinguish his views from those of the radicals? He himself had conceded that “the church is holy even where the fanatics [Luther’s term for the radicals] are dominant, so long as they do not deny the word and the sacraments.” Alert to the political realities of his situation, he countered by asserting the need for an institutional church. Just as Luther tempered the radical implications of the *sola scriptura* principle by an appeal to tradition (see case study 3.1), so he tempered his potentially radical views on the nature of the true church by insisting that it had to be viewed as an historical institution. The institution of the church is the divinely ordained means of grace. But in countering the radicals by asserting that the church was indeed visible and institutional, Luther found himself having difficulty in distinguishing his views from those of his Catholic opponents. He himself fully appreciated this problem:

We on our part confess that there is much that is Christian and good under the papacy; indeed, everything that is Christian and is good is to be found there and has come to us from this source. For instance, we confess that in the papal church there are the true Holy Scriptures, true baptism, the true sacrament of the altar, the true keys to the forgiveness of sins, the true office of the ministry, the true catechism in the form of the Lord’s Prayer, the Ten Commandments and the articles of the Creed. Luther is thus obliged to assert that “the false church has only the appearance, although it also possesses the Christian offices.” In other words, the medieval church may have looked like the real thing, but it was really something rather different.

It will be helpful to bring out the parallel with the Donatist controversy (see case study 1.6). The Donatists were a breakaway movement in the

North African church, who insisted that the Catholic church of their day had become compromised through its attitude to the Roman authorities during a period of persecution. Only those who had not compromised their personal religious integrity could be recognized as members of the true church. Augustine argued the Catholic case: the church must be recognized as having a mixed membership, both saints and sinners. The righteous and the wicked coexisted within the same church, and no human had the authority to weed out the wicked from the church.

Augustine drew upon the parable of the “wheat and the weeds” (Matthew 13: 24–31) to support this point. In this parable, the owner of a field arrives one morning to find both wheat and weeds (“tares,” in older English translations of the Bible) growing side by side. Selective herbicides being unknown, he is reluctant to try to remove the weeds: by doing so, he would inevitably damage some of the wheat as well. His solution to the problem is to wait until the wheat is ready to harvest, and then separate them. According to Augustine, this parable applies to the church. Like the field in the parable, the church contains both wheat and weeds, the just and the wicked, which coexist until the Day of Judgment. On that day, God will judge between them – and no human is permitted to preempt God’s judgment. The church will thus contain both good and evil until the end of time. Augustine argues that the term “catholic” (which literally means “whole”), as applied to the church, describes its mixed membership of saints and sinners.

The “Donatist” and “Augustinian” views of the church are thus very different. Luther accepted Augustine’s view of the church as a “mixed” body, whereas the radicals developed a Donatist view of the church as a body of the just, and the just alone. Like the Donatists, the radicals demanded moral perfection of their members. The church and the world were opposed to one another as light and darkness, and they had no time for what they regarded as the political compromises of Luther and Zwingli. For Luther, however, corrupt churchmen are found in the church “just as mouse droppings are found among peppercorns, or tares among the grain.” It is one of the ecclesiastical facts of life, recognized by Augustine, which Luther endorses. The magisterial Reformation thus leads to the establishment of a church, whereas the radical Reformation leads to the formation of sects. The sociological distinction between the two movements reflects their different understandings of the nature of the church. Theology and

sociology are closely linked at this point. (Earlier, we noted the famous maxim which represents the Reformation as the triumph of Augustine's doctrine of grace over his doctrine of the church: it is necessary at this point to note that Luther and the other magisterial reformers retained at least this aspect of Augustine's theory of the church.) But what basis does Luther then have for breaking away from the Catholic church? Does not this aspect of his theory of the church necessarily imply that there will always be corruption in the true church? On the basis of Augustine's theory, corruption in the Catholic church does not necessarily mean that it is a "false church."

John Calvin

If any reformer wrestled with the problem posed by the doctrine of the church, it was Calvin. The first major discussion of the theory of the church is to be found in the second edition of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, published in 1539. Although Calvin deals with the subject in the first edition of the *Institutes* (1536), he was then quite innocent of any experience of ecclesiastical management or responsibility, which accounts for the curiously unfocused nature of his discussion. By the time of the second edition of this work, Calvin had gained more experience of the problems presented to the new evangelical churches.

For Calvin, the marks of the true church were that the Word of God should be preached, and that the sacraments be rightly administered. Since the Roman Catholic church did not conform even to this minimalist definition of the church, the evangelicals were perfectly justified in leaving it. And as the evangelical churches conform to this definition of a church, there was no justification for further division within them. This point is of particular importance, reflecting Calvin's political judgment that further fragmentation of the evangelical congregations would be disastrous to the cause of the Reformation.

By 1543, Calvin had gained considerably more experience of ecclesiastical responsibility, particularly during his period at Strasbourg. Martin Bucer, the intellectual force behind the Reformation at Strasbourg, had a considerable reputation as an ecclesiastical administrator, and it is probable that Calvin's later theory of the church reflects his personal influence. The fourfold office of pastor, doctor (or teacher), elder, and

deacon owes its origins to Bucer, as does the distinction between the visible and the invisible church (explored below). Nevertheless, Bucer's suggestion that ecclesiastical discipline was an essential feature (technically, a "note" or "mark") of the church is not echoed by Calvin. Although Calvin includes "example of life" among the "certain sure marks" of the church in the 1536 edition of the *Institutes*, later editions lay stress upon the proper preaching of the word of God and the administration of the sacraments. Discipline strengthens the nerve of the church – but the saving doctrine of Christ establishes its heart and soul.

Calvin draws an important distinction between the visible and invisible church. At one level, the church is the community of Christian believers, a visible group. It is also, however, the fellowship of saints and the company of the elect – an invisible entity. In its invisible aspect, the church is the assembly of the elect, known only to God; in its visible aspect, it is the community of believers on earth. The former consists only of the elect; the latter includes both good and evil, elect and reprobate. The former is an object of faith and hope, the latter of present experience. Calvin stresses that all believers are obliged to honor and to remain committed to the visible church, despite its weaknesses, on account of the invisible church, the true body of Christ. Despite this, there is only one church, a single entity with Jesus Christ as its head.

The distinction between the visible and invisible churches has two important consequences. In the first place, it is to be expected that the visible church will include both the elect and the reprobate. Augustine of Hippo had made this point against the Donatists, using the parable of the tares (Matthew 13: 24–31) as his basis. It lies beyond human competence to discern their difference, correlating human qualities with divine favor (in any case, Calvin's doctrine of predestination precludes such grounds of election). In the second, however, it is necessary to ask which of the various visible churches corresponds to the invisible church. Calvin thus recognizes the need to articulate objective criteria by which the authenticity of a given church may be judged. Two such criteria are stipulated: "Wherever we see the Word of God preached purely and listened to, and the sacraments administered according to the institution of Christ, we cannot doubt that a church exists." It is thus not the quality of its members but the presence of the authorized means of grace which constitutes a true church. This can be

seen clearly in Calvin's classic statement of the mainline Protestant view concerning the identifying features of a church:

Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and listened to, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, it is in no way to be doubted that a church of God exists. ... If the ministry has the Word and honors it, if it has the administration of the sacraments, it deserves without doubt to be held and considered a church. ... When we say that the pure ministry of the Word and pure mode of celebrating the sacraments are a sufficient pledge and guarantee by which we may recognize as a church any society, we mean where both these marks exist, it is not to be rejected, even if it is riddled with faults in other respects.

Note especially Calvin's constant emphasis on the central role played by the preaching of the word of God and the right administration of the sacraments. In that Calvin believes there is a close link between the word of God and its embodiment or representation in the sacraments, it is understandable why he chose to link these two matters together. It may also be noted that Calvin makes no reference to bishops, or historical continuity with the early church, in his definition of a church. For Calvin, such matters may be useful, but they are not definitive. What really matters is that the church should believe and preach the teachings of the apostles, which are contained in the New Testament.

Case study 3.6 Theology and astronomy: The Copernican and Galileian debates

One of the most important developments during the period under study is the growing importance of the natural sciences, and the recognition of the potential implications of the new insights and methods for Christian theology. In the present case study, we shall examine the controversy which centered on the views of Nicholas Copernicus and Galileo Galilei concerning the solar system.

In May 1543, Nicholas Copernicus's *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* ("On the revolutions of the heavenly bodies") was finally published. According to a long-standing tradition, the book appeared just in time to allow Copernicus to see a copy before he died on May 24 of that year. The book set out a heliocentric view of the solar system. According to Copernicus, the Earth and other planets rotated around the sun, which stood at the center of the solar system. (The moon, of course, was agreed to revolve around the Earth.) This marked a significant departure from the older view, which held that all heavenly bodies – including both the sun and the planets – rotated around the Earth.

The older model (often referred to as a "geocentric" theory) was widely accepted by theologians of the Middle Ages, who had become so familiar with reading the text of the Bible through geocentric spectacles that they had some difficulty coping with the new approach. Early published defenses of the Copernican theory (such as G. J. Rheticus's *Treatise on Holy Scripture and the Motion of the Earth*, which is widely regarded as the earliest known work to deal explicitly with the relation of the Bible and the Copernican theory) thus had to deal with two issues. First, they had to set out the observational evidence which led to the conclusion that the Earth and other planets rotated around the sun. Second, they had to demonstrate that this viewpoint was consistent with the Bible, which had long been read as endorsing a geocentric view of the universe.

The rise of the heliocentric theory of the solar system thus caused theologians to re-examine the manner in which certain biblical passages

were interpreted. Three broad approaches can be identified in the Christian tradition of biblical interpretation:

1. *A literal approach.* This argues that the passage in question is to be taken at its face value. For example, a literal interpretation of the first chapter of Genesis would argue that creation took place in six periods of 24 hours.

2. *An allegorical approach.* This stresses that certain sections of the Bible are written in a style which it is not appropriate to take absolutely literally. During the Middle Ages, three non-literal senses of Scripture were recognized; this was regarded by many sixteenth-century writers as somewhat elaborate. This view regards the opening chapters of Genesis as poetic or allegorical accounts, from which theological and ethical principles can be derived; it does not treat them as literal historical accounts of the origins of the earth.

3. *An approach based on the idea of accommodation.* This has been by far the most important approach in relation to the interaction of biblical interpretation and the natural sciences. The approach argues that revelation takes place in culturally and anthropologically conditioned manners and forms, with the result that it needs to be appropriately interpreted. This approach has a long tradition of use within Judaism and subsequently within Christian theology, and can easily be shown to have been influential within the patristic period. Nevertheless, its mature development can be found within the sixteenth century. This approach argues that the opening chapters of Genesis use language and imagery appropriate to the cultural conditions of its original audience; it is not to be taken “literally,” but is to be interpreted for a contemporary readership by extracting the key ideas, which have been expressed in forms and terms which are specifically adapted or “accommodated” to the original audience.

The third approach proved to be of especial importance during the debates over the relation between theology and astronomy during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. The noted reformer John Calvin (1509–64) may be regarded as making two major and positive contributions to the appreciation and development of the natural sciences. First, he positively encouraged the scientific study of nature; second, he eliminated a major obstacle to the development of that study through his understanding of the way in which the Bible was to be interpreted in terms of “accommodation” (as explained

above). His first contribution is specifically linked with his stress upon the orderliness of creation; both the physical world and the human body testify to the wisdom and character of God. Calvin thus commends the study of both astronomy and medicine. They are able to probe more deeply than theology into the natural world, and thus uncover further evidence of the orderliness of the creation and the wisdom of its creator. It may thus be argued that Calvin gave a new religious motivation to the scientific investigation of nature. This was now seen as a means of discerning the wise hand of God in creation.

The *Confessio Belgica* (1561), a Calvinist statement of faith which exercised particular influence in the Lowlands (an area which would become particularly noted for its botanists and physicists), declared that nature is “before our eyes as a most beautiful book in which all created things, whether great or small, are as letters showing the invisible things of God to us.” God can thus be discerned in the detailed study of the creation through the natural sciences.

Calvin’s second major contribution was to eliminate a significant obstacle to the development of the natural sciences – biblical literalism. Calvin points out that the Bible is primarily concerned with the knowledge of Jesus Christ. It is not an astronomical, geographical, or biological textbook. And when the Bible is interpreted, it must be borne in mind that God “adjusts” to the capacities of the human mind and heart. God has to come down to our level if revelation is to take place. Revelation thus presents a scaled-down or “accommodated” version of God to us, in order to meet our limited abilities. Just as a human mother stoops down to reach her child, so God stoops down to come to our level. Revelation is an act of divine condescension.

In the case of the biblical accounts of the creation (Genesis 1), Calvin argues that they are accommodated to the abilities and horizons of a relatively simple and unsophisticated people; they are not intended to be taken as literal representations of reality. The author of Genesis, he declares, “was ordained to be a teacher of the unlearned and primitive, as well as the learned; and so could not achieve his goal without descending to such crude means of instruction.” The phrase “six days of creation” does not designate six periods of 24 hours, but is simply an accommodation to human ways of thinking to designate an extended period of time. The “water above the firmament” is simply an accommodated way of speaking about clouds.

The impact of both these ideas upon scientific theorizing, especially during the seventeenth century, was considerable. For example, the English writer Edward Wright defended Copernicus's heliocentric theory of the solar system against biblical literalists by arguing, in the first place, that Scripture was not concerned with physics, and in the second, that its manner of speaking was "accommodated to the understanding and way of speech of the common people, like nurses to little children." Both these arguments derive directly from Calvin, who may be argued to have made a fundamental contribution to the emergence of the natural sciences in this respect.

Similar arguments emerged in Italy during the early decades of the seventeenth century, as fresh controversy broke out over the heliocentric model of the solar system. This eventually led to the Roman Catholic church condemning Galileo Galilei, in what is widely regarded as a clear error of judgment on the part of some ecclesiastical bureaucrats. Galileo mounted a major defense of the Copernican theory of the solar system. Galileo's views were initially received sympathetically within senior church circles, partly on account of the fact that he was held in high regard by a papal favorite, Giovanni Ciampoli. Ciampoli's fall from power led to Galileo losing support within papal circles, and is widely regarded as opening the way to Galileo's condemnation by his enemies.

Although the controversy centering on Galileo is often portrayed as science versus religion, or libertarianism versus authoritarianism, the real issue concerned the correct interpretation of the Bible. Appreciation of this point is thought to have been hindered in the past on account of the failure of historians to engage with the theological (and, more precisely, the hermeneutical) issues attending the debate. In part, this can be seen as reflecting the fact that many of the scholars interested in this particular controversy were scientists or historians of science, who were not familiar with the intricacies of the debates on biblical interpretation of this remarkably complex period. Nevertheless, it is clear that the issue which dominated the discussion between Galileo and his critics was that of how to interpret certain biblical passages. The issue of accommodation was of major importance to that debate, as we shall see.

To explore this point, we may turn to a significant work published in January 1615. In his *Letter on the opinion of the Pythagoreans and Copernicus*, the Carmelite friar Paolo Antonio Foscarini argued that the

heliocentric model of the solar system was not incompatible with the Bible. Foscarini did not introduce any new principles of biblical interpretation in his analysis; rather, he sets out and applies traditional rules of interpretation:

When Holy Scripture attributes something to God or to any other creature which would otherwise be improper and incommensurate, then it should be interpreted and explained in one or more of the following ways. First, it is said to pertain metaphorically and proportionally, or by similitude. Second, it is said ... according to our mode of consideration, apprehension, understanding, knowing, etc. Thirdly, it is said according to vulgar opinion and the common way of speaking.

The second and third ways which Foscarini identifies are generally regarded as types of “accommodation,” the third model of biblical interpretation noted above. As we have seen, this approach to biblical interpretation can be traced back to the first Christian centuries, and was not regarded as controversial.

Foscarini’s innovation did not lie in the interpretive method he adopted, but in the biblical passages to which he applied it. In other words, Foscarini suggested that certain passages, which many had interpreted literally up to this point, were to be interpreted in an accommodated manner. The passages to which he applied this approach were those which seemed to suggest that the earth remained stationary, and the sun moved. Foscarini argued as follows:

Scripture speaks according to our mode of understanding, and according to appearances, and in respect to us. For thus it is that these bodies appear to be related to us and are described by the common and vulgar mode of human thinking, namely, the earth seems to stand still and to be immobile, and the sun seems to rotate around it. And hence Scripture serves us by speaking in the vulgar and common manner; for from our point of view it does seem that the earth stands firmly in the center and that the sun revolves around it, rather than the contrary.

Galileo’s growing commitment to the Copernican position led him to adopt an approach to biblical interpretation similar to Foscarini’s.

The real issue was how to interpret the Bible. Galileo’s critics argued that some biblical passages contradicted him. For example, they argued, Joshua 10: 12 spoke of the sun standing still at Joshua’s command. Did not that prove beyond reasonable doubt that it was the sun which moved around the

earth? In his Letter to the Grand Countess Christina, Galileo countered with an argument that this was simply a common way of speaking. Joshua could not be expected to know the intricacies of celestial mechanics, and therefore used an “accommodated” way of speaking.

The official condemnation of this viewpoint was based on two considerations:

1. Scripture is to be interpreted according “to the proper meaning of the words.” The accommodated approach adopted by Foscarini is thus rejected in favor of a more literal approach. As we have stressed, both methods of interpretation were accepted as legitimate, and had a long history of use within Christian theology. The debate centered on the question of which was appropriate to the passages in question.

2. The Bible is to be interpreted “according to the common interpretation and understanding of the Holy Fathers and of learned theologians.” In other words, it was being argued that nobody of any significance had adopted Foscarini’s interpretation in the past; it was therefore to be dismissed as an innovation.

It therefore followed that the views of both Foscarini and Galileo were to be rejected as innovations, without any precedent in Christian thought.

This second point is of major importance, and needs to be examined more carefully, in that it is to be set against the long-standing and bitter debate, fueled during the seventeenth century by the Thirty Years War (1618–48), between Protestantism and Roman Catholicism over whether the former was an innovation or a recovery of authentic Christianity. The idea of the unchangeability of the Catholic tradition became an integral element of Roman Catholic polemic against Protestantism. As Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet (1627–1704), one of the most formidable apologists for Roman Catholicism, put this point in 1688:

The teaching of the church is always the same. ... The gospel is never different from what it was before. Hence, if at any time someone says that the faith includes something which yesterday was not said to be of the faith, it is always heterodoxy, which is any doctrine different from orthodoxy. There is no difficulty about recognizing false doctrine; there is no argument about it. It is recognized at once, whenever it appears, simply because it is new.

These same arguments were widely used at the opening of the century, and are clearly reflected and embodied in the official critique of Foscarini. The interpretation he offered had never been offered before – and it was, for that reason alone, wrong.

It will therefore be clear that this critical debate over the interpretation of the Bible must be set against a complex background. The highly charged and politicized atmosphere at the time seriously prejudiced theological debate, for fear that the concession of any new approach might be seen as an indirect concession of the Protestant claim to legitimacy. To allow that Roman Catholic teaching on any matter of significance had “changed” was potentially to open the floodgates which would inevitably lead to demands for recognition of the orthodoxy of central Protestant teachings – teachings that the Roman Catholic church had been able to reject as “innovations” up to this point.

It was thus inevitable that Galileo’s views would meet with resistance. The key factor was that of theological innovation: to concede Galileo’s interpretation of certain biblical passages would seriously undermine the Catholic criticisms of Protestantism, which involved the assertion that Protestantism introduced new (and therefore erroneous) interpretations of certain biblical passages. It was only a matter of time before his views would be rejected. Without the protection of Ciampoli, the papal favorite, Galileo was vulnerable to the charges of “heresy through innovation” which were leveled against him by his critics.

The controversy which focused on Galileo is often presented in a highly simplified form in textbooks, typically as an example of “science versus religion.” As this case study will have made clear, the issues were much more complex than this. The controversy has to be set against a background of court politics, personality clashes, and a ferocious struggle on the part of the Catholic church to defend itself against Protestantism – as well as a genuine attempt to understand the Bible correctly!

4

The Modern Period, 1750 to the Present Day

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In this final chapter, we shall consider the development of Christian theology up to the present day. During this period, Christianity underwent significant transformation and expansion outside its traditional European homelands, while experiencing considerable difficulties and tensions within them. From 1700 onward, Christian theology moved away from a western European context to become a global phenomenon.

The colonization of North America by western Europeans, especially from Scandinavia, Germany, and England, led to the various schools of Protestant theology – Lutheran, Reformed, and Anabaptist – becoming firmly settled in a North American context. Jonathan Edwards (1703–58), closely linked with the religious revival generally known as the Great Awakening (c.1726–45), is the most significant American theologian of this age. Later waves of immigration, especially from Ireland and Italy, led to Roman Catholic theology becoming of increasing significance.

The establishment of seminaries by various denominations (such as Princeton Theological Seminary by the Presbyterians) consolidated the importance of the United States of America as a leading center of Christian theological teaching and research. However, it was not until the middle of the twentieth century that America came to assume global significance in theological discussions; until that point, German and British theology tended to dominate, partly on account of the continuing immigration of European theologians into the United States. Such theologians, who had trained in European contexts, tended to maintain a European emphasis in their teaching and orientation.

Elsewhere in the world, expansion continued. The enormous impact of Christian missions in Australasia, India, the Far East, and sub-Saharan Africa led to Christian theological seminaries, high schools, and universities becoming established in these regions, and gradually divesting themselves of their western European roots. The development of “local theologies” has become an issue of increasing importance in such regions, particularly as the perceived “Eurocentrism” of much Christian theologizing has been subjected to considerable critical comment on the part of native writers.

Greek term, literally meaning “action,” adopted by Karl Marx to emphasize the importance of action in relation to thinking.

This can be seen in Latin America, where there has been a reaction against the Catholicism exported to the region at the time of the Spanish and Portuguese conquests. The rise of liberation theology (see pp. 204–6), with its characteristic emphasis upon the importance of **praxis**, the prioritization of the situation of the poor, and the orientation of theology toward political liberation, may have mitigated this trend, but it did not reverse it. The chief beneficiaries of this trend appear to be evangelicals and **charismatics** in the region.

Term associated with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Often used to refer to styles of theology and worship that place particular emphasis upon the immediate presence and experience of the Holy Spirit.

Given the vast expansion and diversification of Christian theological writing, exploration, and debate since about 1750, this survey chapter aims to note some trends and developments that are important for historical theology. Limitations on space mean that a detailed engagement with everything that needs to be covered is quite impossible. We shall, however,

try to gain something of a bird's-eye view of the historical developments that shape the contemporary theological landscape, even if we cannot fill in the fine detail that is needed for many purposes.

We begin by surveying some of the many cultural developments that shape the environment in which Christian theology has been done in recent centuries. This is followed by an exploration of some of the denominational distinctives of recent theological debate. Finally, we consider some of the schools of thought or movements which have emerged as important in this period.

A Cultural Watershed: The Enlightenment

The movement which now generally known as “the Enlightenment” ushered in a period of considerable uncertainty for Christianity in western Europe and North America. The trauma of the Reformation and the resulting Wars of Religion had barely subsided on the continent of Europe, before a new and more radical challenge to Christianity arose. The origins of the Enlightenment lie partly in English Deism, a movement that developed in the late seventeenth century. Sir Isaac Newton (1643–1727) had argued that the universe was like a vast machine, rationally designed and constructed by an intelligent creator. Deism minimized the supernatural dimensions of faith, and presented Christianity essentially as a rational and moral religion, easily harmonized with human reason. God was the creator of the kind of regular, ordered universe that Newtonian mechanics had uncovered.

The phrase “Age of Reason,” often used as a synonym for the Enlightenment, is a little misleading. It implies that reason had been hitherto ignored or marginalized. As we saw in an earlier chapter (pp. 94–5), the Middle Ages can quite legitimately be thought of as an “Age of Reason.” A defining characteristic of the Enlightenment is its emphasis on the ability of human reason to penetrate the mysteries of the world. Humanity is able to think for itself, without the need for any assistance from God. Unaided human reason is able to make sense of the world – including those aspects of that world traditionally reserved for theologians.

The Enlightenment is of major importance to historical theology, not least because it championed the historical critique of traditional Christian doctrines – a trend probably most associated with the “quest of the historical Jesus,” which has its roots in the early Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment Critique of Christian Theology

The Enlightenment criticism of many traditional Christian beliefs was based upon the principle of the omniscience of human reason. A number of stages in the development of this belief may be discerned.

First, it was argued that the beliefs of Christianity were rational, and thus capable of standing up to critical examination. This type of approach may be found in John Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695), and within some philosophical schools of thought in early eighteenth-century Germany. Christianity was a reasonable supplement to natural religion. The notion of divine revelation was thus maintained.

Second, it was argued that the basic ideas of Christianity, being rational, could be derived from reason itself. There was no need to invoke the idea of divine revelation. Christianity, according to John Toland in his *Christianity Not Mystical* (1696) and Matthew Tindal in his *Christianity as Old as Creation* (1730), was essentially the republication of the religion of nature. It did not transcend natural religion, but was merely an example of it. All so-called "revealed religion" was actually nothing other than the reconfirmation of what can be known through rational reflection on nature. "Revelation" was simply a rational reaffirmation of moral truths already available to enlightened reason.

Third, the ability of reason to judge revelation was affirmed. As critical reason was omniscient, it was argued that it was supremely qualified to judge Christian beliefs and practices, with a view to eliminating any irrational or superstitious elements. This view, associated with Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768) in Germany and many eighteenth-century French rationalist writers (often referred to collectively as *les philosophes*), placed reason firmly above revelation. This view of reason was symbolized in one of the landmark events of the French Revolution – the enthronement of the Goddess of Reason in the cathedral of Notre Dame de Paris in 1793.

Having sketched the general principles of the Enlightenment challenge to traditional Christian thought, we may now explore how these impacted on specific doctrinal themes. The rational religion of the Enlightenment found

itself in conflict with several major areas of traditional Christian theology. The following are especially important.

The notion of revelation

The concept of revelation was of central importance to traditional Christian theology. While many Christian theologians (such as Thomas Aquinas and John Calvin) recognized the possibility of a natural knowledge of God, they insisted that this required supplementation by supernatural divine revelation, such as that witnessed to in Scripture. The Enlightenment witnessed the development of an increasingly critical attitude to the very idea of supernatural revelation. In the first place, it was unnecessary. In the second, it lacked the universality of human reason. Everyone had access to reason; only a select few had access to revelation. The phrase “the scandal of particularity” was used by Enlightenment writers in expressing their concerns about the traditional notion of revelation at this point.

The status and interpretation of the Bible

Within orthodox Christianity, whether Protestant or Roman Catholic, the Bible was still widely regarded as a divinely inspired source of doctrine and morals, to be differentiated from other types of literature. The Enlightenment saw this assumption called into question, with the rise of the critical approach to Scripture. Developing ideas already current within Deism, the theologians of the German Enlightenment developed the thesis that the Bible was the work of many hands, at times demonstrating internal contradiction, and that it was open to precisely the same method of textual analysis and interpretation as any other piece of literature.

The identity and significance of Jesus Christ

A third area in which the Enlightenment made a significant challenge to orthodox Christian belief concerns the person of Jesus of Nazareth. Two particularly important developments may be noted: the origins of the “quest of the historical Jesus” and the rise of the “moral theory of the atonement.” Each of these significant historical developments is linked with key themes of the Enlightenment worldview.

Both Deism and the German Enlightenment developed the thesis that there was a serious discrepancy between the real Jesus of history and the New Testament interpretation of his significance. It was argued that a simple human figure, a glorified teacher of common sense, lay hidden behind or underneath the New Testament portrait of the supernatural redeemer of humanity. While a supernatural redeemer was unacceptable to Enlightenment rationalism, the idea of an enlightened moral teacher was not. H. S. Reimarus and others argued that it was possible to go behind the New Testament accounts of Jesus and uncover a simpler, more human Jesus, who would be acceptable to the new spirit of the age.

The second aspect of traditional ideas concerning Jesus to be challenged by Enlightenment thinkers concerned the significance of his death (an area of theology often referred to as “theories of the atonement”). For orthodoxy, Jesus’ death on the cross was interpreted from the standpoint of the Resurrection (which the Enlightenment was not prepared to accept as an historical event) as a way in which God was able to forgive the sins of humanity. During the Enlightenment this “theory of the atonement” was subjected to increasing criticism, as involving arbitrary and unacceptable hypotheses such as that of original sin.

Jesus’ death on the cross was now reinterpreted in terms of a supreme moral example of self-giving and dedication, intended to inspire similar dedication and self-giving on the part of his followers. Where orthodox Christianity tended to treat Jesus’ death (and resurrection) as possessing greater inherent importance than his religious teaching, the Enlightenment marginalized his death and denied his resurrection, in order to emphasize the quality of his moral teaching.

The doctrine of the Trinity

The doctrine of God as a trinity – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – was widely ridiculed by Enlightenment thinkers, who held it to be logically absurd. How could any rational person accept such mathematical nonsense? Under the pressure of rationalist criticism, many orthodox Christian thinkers de-emphasized the idea, believing that it was impossible to mount an effective defense of the doctrine, given the spirit of the age. It is important to note that the revival of the doctrine of the Trinity dates from the twentieth century, as the influence of the Enlightenment began to wane.

Throughout the period of the Enlightenment, rationalist pressure led to many Christian theologians developing approaches to the doctrine of God that came close to Deism. God was the supreme governor of the universe, the creator of all things. This approach is especially evident in eighteenth-century English theology, which saw God as the “divine watchmaker,” the constructor of an ordered and regular universe. Trinitarian theology went into hibernation for much of the Enlightenment period, and only reemerged in the early twentieth century, as confidence in the Enlightenment worldview began to collapse after the trauma of World War I.

The critique of miracles

Much traditional Christian **apologetics** concerning the identity and significance of Jesus Christ was based upon the “miraculous evidences” of the New Testament, culminating in the Resurrection. The new emphasis upon the mechanical regularity and orderliness of the universe, perhaps the most significant intellectual legacy of Newtonianism, raised doubts about the New Testament accounts of miraculous happenings. David Hume’s *Essay on Miracles* (1748) was widely regarded as demonstrating the evidential impossibility of miracles. Hume emphasized that there were no contemporary analogues of New Testament miracles, such as the Resurrection, thus forcing the New Testament reader to rely totally upon human testimony to such miracles. For Hume (1711–76), it was axiomatic that no human testimony was adequate to establish the occurrence of a miracle, in the absence of a present-day analogue.

Area of Christian theology that focuses on the defense of the Christian faith.

Similarly, the French rationalist writer Denis Diderot (1713–84) declared that if the entire population of Paris were to assure him that a dead man had just been raised from the dead, he would not believe a word of it. The past was analogous to the present, and the absence of resurrections in the eighteenth century was a telling argument against any hypothetical resurrection in the first.

The rejection of original sin

The idea that human nature is in some sense flawed or corrupted, expressed in the orthodox doctrine of original sin, was vigorously opposed by the Enlightenment. Leading figures of the French Enlightenment – such as Voltaire (1694–1778) and Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–78) – criticized the doctrine as encouraging pessimism with regard to human abilities, thus impeding human social and political development, and encouraging laissez-faire attitudes. German Enlightenment thinkers tended to criticize the doctrine on account of its relatively late historical origins in the thought of Augustine of Hippo, dating from the fourth and fifth centuries, which they regarded as debarring it from permanent validity and relevance.

The problem of evil

The Enlightenment witnessed a fundamental change in attitude toward the existence of evil in the world. For the medieval period, the existence of evil was not regarded as posing a threat to the coherence of Christianity. The contradiction implicit in the existence both of a benevolent divine omnipotence and of evil was not regarded as an obstacle to belief, but simply as an academic theological problem. The Enlightenment saw this situation change radically: the existence of evil metamorphosed into a challenge to the credibility and coherence of Christian faith itself. Voltaire's novel *Candide* (1759) was one of many works to highlight the difficulties caused for the Christian worldview by the existence of natural evil (such as the famous Lisbon earthquake of 1755). The term "theodicy," coined by the German philosopher Leibniz, derives from this period, reflecting a growing recognition that the existence of evil was assuming a new significance within the Enlightenment critique of religion.

Romanticism and the Critique of the Enlightenment

In the closing decade of the eighteenth century, increasing misgivings came to be expressed concerning the arid quality of rationalism. Reason, once seen as a liberator, came increasingly to be regarded as spiritually enslaving. These anxieties were not expressed so much within university faculties of philosophy as within literary and artistic circles, particularly in the Prussian capital, Berlin. The Romantic movement replaced an appeal to pure reason with an appeal to human intuition, imagination, and feelings.

“Romanticism” is notoriously difficult to define. The movement is perhaps best seen as a reaction against certain of the central themes of the Enlightenment, most notably the claim that reality can be known to the human reason. It protested against any reduction of reality to a series of rationalized simplicities. Instead, Romanticism made an appeal to the human imagination, which it held to be capable of providing a synthesis of the complexities and tensions which it observed in nature and in human feelings. The Enlightenment, according to its Romantic critics, failed to do justice to the complexity of the world in its attempt to reduce the “mystery of the universe” – to use a phrase found in the writings of Augustus William Schlegel – to neat logical formulae.

The development of Romanticism had considerable implications for Christianity in Europe. Those aspects of Christianity (especially Catholicism) which rationalism found distasteful on account of its symbolism or appeal to emotions came to captivate the imaginations of the Romantics. Rationalism was seen as experientially and emotionally deficient, incapable of meeting real human needs that were traditionally addressed and satisfied by Christian faith. As F. R. de Chateaubriand (1768–1848) remarked of the situation in France in the first decade of the nineteenth century, “there was a need for faith, a desire for religious consolation, which came from the very lack of that consolation for so long.” Similar views were common within the German context in the closing years of the eighteenth century.

That rationalism had failed to undermine religion is clear from developments in England, Germany, and North America. The new strength evident in German Pietism and English evangelicalism in the eighteenth century points to the failure of rationalism to provide a cogent alternative to the prevailing human sense of personal need and meaning. Philosophy came to be seen as sterile, academic in the worst sense of the word, in that it was detached from both the outer realities of life and the inner life of the human consciousness.

It is against this background of growing disillusionment with rationalism, and a new appreciation of the importance of human “feeling,” that the contribution of Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768–1834) is to be seen. Schleiermacher argued that religion in general, and Christianity in particular, was a matter of feeling or “self-consciousness.” His major work of systematic theology, *The Christian Faith* (1821, revised 1834), is an attempt to show how Christian theology is related to a feeling of “absolute dependence.” The structure of *The Christian Faith* is complex, centering on the dialectic between sin and grace. The work is organized in three parts. The first deals with the consciousness of God, concentrating upon such matters as creation. The second part handles the consciousness of sin and its implications, such as an awareness of the possibility of redemption. The final part considers the consciousness of grace, and deals with such matters as the person and work of Christ. In this way, Schleiermacher was able to argue that “everything is related to the redemption accomplished by Jesus of Nazareth.”

Yet Romanticism was ambivalent toward traditional Christianity. While recognizing the importance of religious feeling, and acknowledging the importance of the quest for a transcendent dimension to life, some Romantic writers – such as Percy Bysshe Shelley (1792–1822) – saw this quest as having no necessary connection with the Christian faith. This naturally leads us to consider what is widely described as the “Victorian crisis of faith,” which is often seen as setting the context for many themes in modern theology.

The Crisis of Faith in Victorian England

In his important book *God's Funeral* (2000), A. N. Wilson documents and analyzes the rise of atheism in Victorian Britain. One of the most interesting things about the book is his careful documentation of the ambivalence felt within late nineteenth-century England over its loss of faith. The secular enterprise, begun with great enthusiasm, had achieved substantial successes by the end of the century. Politically and socially, Christianity remained highly significant in national life, and would remain so until after World War I. Yet its ideas were increasingly seen as discredited, unattractive, and outdated by novelists, poets, and artists. Wilson brings out clearly the deep sense of emotional loss and confusion which the inexorable elimination of God brought in its wake.

It is difficult to seize on a single figure as illustrating or causing this crisis of faith. However, the novelist George Eliot (the pen-name of Mary Ann Evans, 1819–90) is regularly identified as a major figure in this emerging climate of suspicion and hostility toward religious faith. Many of Eliot's misgivings about Christianity concerned its apparent lack of concern for issues of morality in its own doctrine. Why, Eliot asked, did Christianity so devalue human love, except when directed toward the praise of God? We can see here a leading theme of the Victorian crisis of faith – a growing moral revolt against Christianity on account of its leading ideas. Writers such as J. A. Froude, Matthew Arnold, and F. W. Newman abandoned their Christian faith on account of a growing sense of the immorality of such doctrines as original sin, predestination, and substitutionary **atonement**.

Traditional way of speaking of the doctrine of the work of Christ.

Eliot, like many others, therefore turned to a “religion of human sympathy” in place of this rather dark and dismal conception of God. Similar patterns of alienation from conventional religion are found throughout her novels, from *Adam Bede* (1859) through to *Middlemarch* (1871–2). The moral aspects of faith can, she believed, be maintained without the metaphysical basics of Christianity. We can be good without

God. Indeed, belief in the Christian God can be a significant obstacle to the achievement of “individual and social happiness.” These views became the received wisdom of the age, shaping the emerging late Victorian consensus on the ability of humanity to shape its own destiny. While some – Thomas Hardy comes to mind – were more pessimistic than Eliot about humanity’s ability to construct morality without God, they were a distinguished minority in this discussion.

The Victorian era is widely regarded as undergoing major changes from about 1870 to 1900, which can be seen as ultimately subverting the values and beliefs of its earlier phases. Many writers of the period were conscious of standing at the threshold of a new age, uncertain of what it might bring, yet suspecting that the old ways of thinking were on their way out. In his *Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse*, written around this time, Matthew Arnold (1822–88) spoke of being caught

Between two worlds, one dead,
The other powerless to be born,
With nowhere to lay my head.

Arnold’s journey through the Alps is the backdrop against which he explores his sense of displacement, focusing especially on the erosion of faith in his culture – and perhaps even in himself. His once robust faith, he comments, more than a little wistfully, now seems “but a dead time’s exploded dream.” Arnold expresses a sense of melancholy and sadness over his nation’s loss of faith, which he saw pathetically mirrored in the ebbing of the tide on Dover beach:

The Sea of Faith
Was once, too, at the full, and round earth’s shore
Lay like the folds of a bright girdle furl’d.
But now I only hear
Its melancholy, long, withdrawing roar,
Retreating, to the breath
Of the night-wind, down the vast edges drear
And naked shingles of the world.

That tide was now ebbing, and Arnold never expected to see it return. It is impossible to read his poem “Dover Beach” without glimpsing something of his pain and bewilderment over his nation’s willing loss of its religious soul.

Postmodernism and a New Theological Agenda

Postmodernism is generally taken to be something of a cultural sensibility without absolutes, fixed certainties, or foundations, which takes delight in pluralism and divergence, and which aims to think through the radical “situatedness” of all human thought. In each of these matters, it may be regarded as a conscious and deliberate reaction against the totalization of the Enlightenment.

To give a full definition of postmodernism is virtually impossible. In part, this is because there is substantially less than total agreement on the nature of the “modernity” which it displaces and supersedes. In fact, the word “postmodernism” itself might be argued to imply that “modernity” is sufficiently well defined and understood that – whatever it is – it may be said to have ended and been superseded. The problem is particularly acute in the case of literature, where “modernism” has always been a contested notion. Nevertheless, it is possible to identify its leading general feature, which is the deliberate and systematic abandonment of centralizing narratives.

Kevin Vanhoozer has recently suggested that the complex phenomenon of postmodernity is best summed up in four criticisms it directs against older ways of thinking:

1. *Reason.* The “modern” approach of reasoning by argument is viewed with suspicion by postmodern writers. Where modernity believed in a single universal reason, postmodernity holds that there are many different kinds of rationality. “They deny the notion of universal rationality; reason is rather a contextual and relative affair.”
2. *Truth.* Postmodernity is suspicious of the idea of truth on account of the way in which it has been used to legitimate oppression, or give justification to vested interests. Truth, on this view, is “a compelling story told by persons in positions of power in order to perpetuate their way of seeing and organizing the natural and social world.”
3. *History.* Where modern writers tried to find universal patterns in history, Vanhoozer suggests that postmodernity is “incredulous towards

narratives that purport to recount universal history.” From the standpoint of Christian apologetics, this means that any attempt to see universal significance in the narrative of Jesus of Nazareth will be viewed with intense suspicion by some in today’s culture.

4. *Self*. Following on from this, postmodernity rejects any notion that there is “one true way of recounting one’s own history” and thus concludes that there is “no true way of narrating one’s own identity.” All ways of understanding the individual are open-ended and partial. There is no universal answer to the question of human identity.

It will thus be clear that there is an inbuilt precommitment to relativism or pluralism within postmodernism in relation to questions of truth. To use the jargon of the movement, one could say that postmodernism represents a situation in which the signifier has replaced the signified as the focus of orientation and value. In terms of the structural linguistics developed initially by Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), and subsequently by Roman Jakobson (1896–1982) and others, the recognition of the arbitrariness of the linguistic sign and its interdependence with other signs marks the end of the possibility of fixed, absolute meanings.

According to de Saussure, a “sign” consists of three things: the signifier (the acoustic image of the spoken words as heard by the intended recipient of the message), the signified (the meaning which is evoked in the mind of this recipient through the stimulus of the signifier), and the unity of these two. For de Saussure, the unity of the signifier with the signified is a cultural convention. There is no universal or transcendent foundation which relates signifier and signified: it is arbitrary, reflecting the contingencies of cultural conditioning.

Developing such insights, writers such as Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007), Jacques Derrida (1930–2004), and Michel Foucault (1926–84) argued that language was ultimately arbitrary, whimsical, and capricious. It was not grounded in any overarching absolute linguistic laws, and was thus incapable of disclosing meaning. Baudrillard argued that modern society was trapped in an endless network of artificial sign systems, which meant nothing, and merely perpetuated the belief systems of those who created them.

One aspect of postmodernism which illustrates this trend particularly well, while also indicating its obsession with texts and language, is deconstruction – the critical method which virtually declares that the

identity and intentions of the author of a text are an irrelevance to the interpretation of the text, prior to insisting that, in any case, no fixed meaning can be found in it. This movement arose primarily as a result of Jacques Derrida's reading of the works of Martin Heidegger in the late 1960s. Two general principles can be seen as underlying this approach to the reading of texts:

1. Anything that is written will convey meanings which its author did not intend, and could not have intended.
2. The author cannot adequately put into words what he or she means in the first place.

All interpretations are thus equally valid, or equally meaningless (depending upon your point of view). As Paul de Man (1919–83), one of the leading proponents of this approach in the United States, declared, the very idea of “meaning” smacked of fascism. This approach, which blossomed in post-Vietnam America, was given the semblance of intellectual respectability by academics such as de Man, Geoffrey Hartman (b.1929), and J. Hillis Miller (b.1928). “Metanarratives” – that is, generalizing narratives which claimed to provide universal frameworks for the discernment of meaning – were to be rejected as authoritarian. Far from discerning meaning, such narratives imposed their own meanings in a fascist manner.

The rise of postmodernism has had an important influence on the shaping of many theological discussions. We shall consider two areas of theology briefly in order to indicate the significance of postmodernism to theological reflection in recent decades:

1. *Biblical interpretation.* Traditional academic biblical interpretation had been dominated by the historico-critical method. This approach, which developed during the nineteenth century, stressed the importance of the application of critical historical methods, such as establishing the *Sitz im Leben*, or “situation in life,” of Gospel passages. A number of leading literary critics of the 1980s – such as Harold Bloom (b.1930) and Frank Kermode (1919–2010) – challenged such ideas as “institutionally legitimized” or “scholarly respectable” interpretations of the Bible. The notion that there is a meaning to a biblical text – whether laid down by a church authority or by the academic community – is thus regarded with considerable suspicion within postmodernism.

2. *Systematic theology*. Postmodernism is, by its very nature, hostile to the notion of “systematization” or any claims to have discerned “meaning.” Mark Taylor’s study *Erring* (1984) is an excellent illustration of the impact of postmodernism on systematic theology. The image of “erring” – rather than more traditional approaches to theological system-building – leads Taylor to develop an anti-systematic theology which offers polyvalent approaches to questions of truth or meaning. Taylor’s study represents an exploration of the consequences of Nietzsche’s declaration of the “death of God.” On the basis of this, Taylor argues for the elimination of such concepts as self, truth, and meaning. Language does not refer to anything, and truth does not correspond to anything.

Key Theologians

A close study of works dealing with theology during the last 200 years demonstrates that a relatively small group of theologians are regularly cited as representing theological benchmarks. Those who feel that theology has been dominated by white European males will, I fear, find many of their concerns confirmed by this finding. It is my hope that this situation will change, and that new names will secure increasing recognition as time passes, so that future editions of this work can respond accordingly.

The purpose of this present section is to introduce the names and agendas of the theologians who have had such an impact in this most recent period of theological reflection. Although many will be discussed in greater detail elsewhere in this volume, readers will find these brief introductions helpful in orientating themselves within the complex landscape of modern theology.

F. D. E. Schleiermacher

Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768–1834) is widely regarded as the most important Protestant theologian of the nineteenth century. He rose to fame through his recognition of the need to make Christianity relevant and accessible to its “cultural despisers” of the Enlightenment. His *Christian Faith* (1821–2; revised edition, 1830–1) set out a systematic approach to Christian theology, based on an appeal to the “experience of absolute dependence.” Although widely respected for his contributions to the interpretation and criticism of Kant, and his work on hermeneutics, Schleiermacher is best seen as a theologian who laid the intellectual foundations for the rise of liberal Protestantism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

John Henry Newman

Few English-language theologians have had such an impact as John Henry Newman (1801–90). Newman studied at Oxford University, and went on to become vicar of the University Church, Oxford. He became a leading figure in the Oxford Movement, which sought to renew the High Church tradition within Anglicanism. In 1845, he was received into the Roman Catholic Church, becoming a cardinal in 1879. Although Newman wrote several works of historical theology, these do not show him at his best and often rest on questionable judgments. His most important work concerned the development of doctrine in his *Essay on the Development of Christian Doctrine* (1845), and the clarification of the relation of faith and reason (see especially his *Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*, 1870).

Karl Barth

The Swiss writer Karl Barth (1886–1968) is now virtually universally regarded as the greatest Protestant theologian of the twentieth century, and possibly since the Reformation. Initially brought up within the context of liberal Protestantism, Barth placed an emphasis on divine revelation which forced a reevaluation of much existing theology. The style of theology associated with Barth was initially termed “dialectical theology” or “neo-orthodoxy,” although neither is particularly helpful in understanding his theological agenda. For Barth, theology was an autonomous discipline, whose task was to respond to what it found in God’s self-revelation. Although Barth’s early writings are often critical, rather than constructive (such as his famous *Romans* commentary of 1919), his *Church Dogmatics* (incomplete at the time of his death) is a positive, constructive presentation of his theological program. Barth has had a major impact on many areas of theology, particularly in relation to the concept of revelation. The twentieth-century renaissance of Trinitarian theology is widely put down to his influence.

Paul Tillich

Although Paul Tillich (1886–1965) originally studied theology in Germany, he was forced to resign his teaching positions due to his opposition to Nazism. He emigrated to the United States, and initially taught at Union Theological Seminary, New York, before accepting a position at Harvard University. He became an American citizen in 1940. Tillich can be seen as continuing and extending the theological program of F. D. E. Schleiermacher. His theological agenda can be summarized as an attempt to correlate culture and faith in such a way that “faith need not be unacceptable to contemporary culture and contemporary culture need not be unacceptable to faith.” Making extensive use of existentialism, Tillich set out to present and interpret the Christian faith to modern western culture, stressing the “correlation” between the “ultimate questions” of humanity and the answers provided by the Christian faith. Although this approach is clearly set out in works such as *The Shaking of the Foundations* (1948), it is best studied from his major work, *Systematic Theology* (1951–63).

Karl Rahner

Of the many Roman Catholic theologians to rise to prominence during the twentieth century, the German writer Karl Rahner (1904–84), a member of the Society of Jesus, is generally regarded as the most significant. One of Rahner's most impressive achievements is the rehabilitation of the essay as a tool of theological exploration. The most significant source for Rahner's thought is not a substantial work of dogmatic theology, but a relatively loose and unstructured collection of essays published over the period 1954–84, and known in English as *Theological Investigations*. These essays show how a relatively unsystematic approach to theology can nevertheless give rise to a coherent theological program. Perhaps the most important aspect of Rahner's theological program is his "transcendental method," which he saw as a Christian response to the secular loss of the transcendence of God. Whereas earlier generations attempted to meet this challenge through liberal or modernist accommodationist strategies, Rahner argued that the recovery of a sense of the transcendent could only be achieved through a reappropriation of the classical sources of Christian theology, especially Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. Rahner's particular approach involves the fusion of Thomism with central aspects of German idealism and existentialism.

Hans Urs von Balthasar

The Swiss Roman Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905–88) has had a major impact on recent theological debate, especially in relation to questions of beauty. Von Balthasar's chief work, published over the period 1961–9, is entitled *The Glory of the Lord*. It sets out the idea of Christianity as a response to God's self-revelation, laying special emphasis upon the notion of faith as a response to the vision of the beauty of the Lord. His analysis of theology in terms of contemplation of the good, the beautiful, and the true has won many admirers. Other major works include his *Theo-Drama: Theological Dramatic Theory*, a five-volume work on what he terms "theodramatics," the action of God and the human response, seen especially in the events of Good Friday, Holy Saturday, and Easter Day; and his *Theo-Logic*, which deals with the relation of Jesus Christ to reality itself.

Jürgen Moltmann

The German Protestant theologian Jürgen Moltmann (b.1926) developed his interest in theology during his time spent in a prisoner-of-war camp near Nottingham, England, where he recalls reading Reinhold Niebuhr's landmark work *The Nature and Destiny of Man*. After returning to Germany, Moltmann began his career as a theologian. The work that brought him to international attention was his trilogy: *The Theology of Hope* (1964), *The Crucified God* (1972), and *The Church in the Power of the Spirit* (1975). In the first of these, Moltmann addressed the question of hope in dialogue with the Marxist writer Ernst Bloch. *The Crucified God* explored the relevance of Christ to a suffering world, and developed a pioneering approach to the notion of "a suffering God." Although Moltmann has subsequently made landmark contributions to other areas of theology (especially the doctrine of creation, the doctrine of the Trinity, and ecological issues), he is still chiefly remembered for these earlier works.

Wolfgang Pannenberg

The German Protestant theologian Wolfgang Pannenberg (b.1928) rose to prominence during the 1960s on account of his work on “revelation as history.” This approach to theology argued that revelation could be discerned within the historical process itself. For Pannenberg, God conducts his self-disclosure through his actions, primarily in the history of Israel, and in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Developing this theme in *Jesus – God and Man* (1968), Pannenberg pointed to the resurrection of Christ as providing the vantage point from which history could be properly interpreted. Pannenberg’s interests include questions of theological method (best seen in his early work *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*), which have more recently been extended to include an important discussion of the interaction of Christian theology and the natural sciences. The definitive statement of his mature theology is to be seen in his *Systematic Theology* (1988–93).

Some Recent Western Theological Movements and Trends

In previous sections of this chapter, we have looked at some of the broader cultural influences on Christian theology in the modern era, as well as noting some theologians of importance. In what follows, we shall explore some major recent movements and trends in western theology.

Liberal Protestantism

Liberal Protestantism is unquestionably one of the most important movements to have arisen within modern Christian thought. Its origins are complex. However, it is helpful to think of it as having arisen in response to the theological program set out by F. D. E. Schleiermacher, especially in relation to his emphasis upon human “feeling” (see pp. 188–9) and the need to relate Christian faith to the human situation. Classic liberal Protestantism had its origins in the Germany of the mid-nineteenth century, amid a growing realization that Christian faith and theology alike required reconstruction in the light of modern knowledge. In England, the increasingly positive reception given to Charles Darwin’s theory of natural selection (popularly known as the “Darwinian theory of evolution”) created a climate in which some elements of traditional Christian theology (such as the doctrine of the seven days of creation) seemed to be increasingly untenable. From its outset, liberalism was committed to bridging the gap between Christian faith and modern knowledge.

Liberalism’s program required a significant degree of flexibility in relation to traditional Christian theology. Its leading writers argued that reconstruction of belief was essential if Christianity were to remain a serious intellectual option in the modern world. For this reason, they demanded a degree of freedom in relation to the doctrinal inheritance of Christianity on the one hand, and traditional methods of biblical interpretation on the other. Where traditional ways of interpreting Scripture, or traditional beliefs, seemed to be compromised by developments in human knowledge, it was imperative that they should be discarded or reinterpreted to bring them into line with what was now known about the world.

The theological implications of this shift in direction were considerable. A number of Christian beliefs came to be regarded as seriously out of line with modern cultural norms; these were dealt with in two ways:

1. They were *abandoned*, as resting upon outdated or mistaken presuppositions. The doctrine of original sin is a case in point; this was put down to a misreading of the New Testament in the light of the writings of Augustine, whose judgment on these matters had become clouded by his over-involvement with a fatalist sect (the Manichees).

2. They were *reinterpreted*, in a manner more conducive to the spirit of the age. A number of central doctrines relating to the person of Jesus Christ may be included in this category, including his divinity (which was reinterpreted as an affirmation of Jesus exemplifying qualities which humanity as a whole could hope to emulate).

Alongside this process of doctrinal reinterpretation (which continued in the “history of dogma” movement: see pp. 10–11) may be seen a new concern to ground Christian faith in the world of humanity – above all, in human experience and modern culture. Sensing potential difficulties in grounding Christian faith in an exclusive appeal to Scripture or the person of Jesus Christ, liberalism sought to anchor that faith in common human experience, and interpret it in ways that made sense within the modern worldview.

Liberalism was inspired by the vision of a humanity which was ascending upward into new realms of progress and prosperity. The doctrine of evolution gave new vitality to this belief, which was nurtured by strong evidence of cultural stability and progress in western Europe in the late nineteenth century. Religion came increasingly to be seen as relating to the spiritual needs of modern humanity and giving ethical guidance to society.

Many critics of the movement – such as Karl Barth in Europe and Reinhold Niebuhr in North America – regarded liberal Protestantism as based upon an unduly optimistic view of human nature. They believed that this optimism had been discredited by the events of World War I, and that liberalism would henceforth lack cultural credibility. This has proved to be a considerable misjudgment. At its best, liberalism may be regarded as a movement committed to the restatement of Christian faith in forms that are acceptable within contemporary culture. Liberalism has continued to see itself as a mediator between two unacceptable alternatives: the mere restatement of traditional Christian faith (usually described as “traditionalism” or “fundamentalism” by its liberal critics), and the total rejection of Christianity. Liberal writers have been passionately committed to the search for a middle road between these two stark alternatives.

Perhaps the most developed and influential presentation of liberal Protestantism is to be found in the writings of the German émigré Paul Tillich (1886–1965), who rose to fame in the United States in the late 1950s and early 1960s, toward the end of his career, and who is widely regarded as the most influential American theologian since Jonathan Edwards. (Some

scholars, however, prefer to refer to Tillich as “neoliberal,” recognizing that his work represents a development, rather than a mere reworking, of classic liberal Protestant themes.) Tillich’s theological program can be summarized in the term “correlation.” By the “method of correlation” Tillich understands the task of modern theology to be to establish a conversation between human culture and Christian faith. Tillich reacted with alarm to the theological program set out by Karl Barth, seeing this as a misguided attempt to drive a wedge between theology and culture.

For Tillich, existential questions – or “ultimate questions,” as he often terms them – are thrown up and revealed by human culture. Modern philosophy, writing, and the creative arts point to questions which concern humans. Theology then formulates answers to these questions, and by doing so it correlates the gospel to modern culture. The gospel must speak to culture, and it can do so only if the actual questions raised by that culture are heard. For David Tracy of the University of Chicago, the image of a dialogue between the gospel and culture is controlling: that dialogue involves the mutual correction and enrichment of both gospel and culture. There is thus a close relation between theology and apologetics, in that the task of theology is understood to be that of interpreting the Christian response to the human needs disclosed by cultural analysis.

The term “liberal” is thus probably best interpreted as designating “a theologian in the tradition of Schleiermacher and Tillich, concerned with the reconstruction of belief in response to contemporary culture” (David Tracy), in which form it describes many noted modern writers. However, it must be noted that the current use of the term “liberal” is somewhat imprecise and confusing.

Liberal Protestantism has been criticized on a number of points, of which the following are representative:

1. It tends to place considerable weight upon the notion of a universal human religious experience. Yet this is a vague and ill-defined notion, incapable of being examined and assessed publicly. There are also excellent reasons for suggesting that “experience” is shaped by interpretation to a far greater extent than liberalism allows.
2. Liberalism is seen by its critics as placing too great an emphasis upon transient cultural developments, with the result that it often appears to be uncritically driven by a secular agenda.

3. It has been suggested that liberalism is too ready to surrender distinctive Christian doctrines in an effort to become acceptable to contemporary culture.

Liberalism probably reached its zenith in North America during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Although continuing to maintain a distinguished presence in seminaries and schools of religion, cultural changes during the 1990s have led some to see it as a waning force both in modern theology and in church life in general. The weaknesses of liberalism have been seized upon by critics within the postliberal school, to be considered shortly. Much the same criticism can also be directed against a movement known loosely as “modernism,” to which we now turn.

Modernism

The term “modernist” was first used to refer to a school of Catholic theologians operating toward the end of the nineteenth century, which adopted a critical attitude to traditional Christian doctrines, especially those relating to the identity and significance of Jesus of Nazareth. The movement fostered a positive attitude toward radical biblical criticism, and stressed the ethical, rather than the more theological, dimensions of faith. In many ways, modernism may be seen as an attempt by writers within the Roman Catholic Church to come to terms with the outlook of the Enlightenment, which it had, until that point, largely ignored.

Among Roman Catholic modernist writers, particular attention should be paid to Alfred Loisy (1857–1940) and George Tyrrell (1861–1909). During the 1890s, Loisy established himself as a critic of traditional views of the biblical accounts of creation, and argued that a real development of doctrine could be discerned within Scripture. His most significant publication, *The Gospel and the Church*, appeared in 1902. This important work was a direct response to the views of Adolf von Harnack (1851–1930), published two years earlier as *What Is Christianity?*, on the origins and nature of Christianity. Loisy rejected Harnack’s suggestion that there was a radical discontinuity between Jesus and the church; however, he made significant concessions to Harnack’s liberal Protestant account of Christian origins, including an acceptance of the role and validity of biblical criticism in interpreting the Gospels. As a result, the work was placed upon the list of prohibited books by the Catholic authorities in 1903.

The British Jesuit writer George Tyrrell followed Loisy in his radical criticism of traditional Catholic dogma. In common with Loisy, he criticized Harnack’s account of Christian origins in *Christianity at the Crossroads* (1909), famously dismissing Harnack’s historical reconstruction of Jesus as “the reflection of a Liberal Protestant face, seen at the bottom of a deep well.” The book also included a defense of Loisy’s work, arguing that the official Roman Catholic hostility to the book and its author had created a general impression that it was a defense of Liberal Protestant against Roman Catholic positions, and that “modernism is simply a protestantizing and rationalizing movement.”

In part, this perception may be due to the growing influence of similar modernist attitudes within the mainstream Protestant denominations. In England, the Churchmen's Union was founded in 1898 for the advancement of liberal religious thought; in 1928, it altered its name to the Modern Churchmen's Union. Among those especially associated with this group may be noted Hastings Rashdall (1858–1924), whose *Idea of Atonement in Christian Theology* (1919) illustrates the general tenor of English modernism. Drawing somewhat uncritically upon the earlier writings of liberal Protestant thinkers such as Ritschl, Rashdall argued that the theory of the atonement associated with the medieval writer Peter Abelard (1079–1142) was more acceptable to modern thought forms than traditional theories which made an appeal to the notion of a substitutionary sacrifice. This strongly moral or exemplarist theory of the atonement, which interpreted Christ's death virtually exclusively as a demonstration of the love of God, made a considerable impact upon English, and especially Anglican, thought in the 1920s and 1930s. Nevertheless, the events of World War I and the subsequent rise of fascism in Europe in the 1930s undermined the credibility of the movement. It was not until the 1960s that a renewed modernism or radicalism became a significant feature of English Christianity.

The rise of modernism in the United States follows a similar pattern. The growth of liberal Protestantism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was widely perceived as a direct challenge to more conservative evangelical standpoints. Newman Smyth's *Passing Protestantism and Coming Catholicism* (1908) argued that Roman Catholic modernism could serve as a mentor to American Protestantism in several ways, not least in its critique of dogma and its historical understanding of the development of doctrine. The situation became increasingly polarized through the rise of fundamentalism in response to modernist attitudes.

World War I ushered in a period of self-questioning within American modernism that was intensified through the radical social realism of writers such as H. R. Niebuhr. By the mid-1930s, modernism appeared to have lost its way. In an influential article in *The Christian Century* of December 4, 1935, Harry Emerson Fosdick declared the need "to go beyond modernism." In his *Realistic Theology* (1934), Walter Marshall Horton spoke of the rout of liberal forces in American theology. However, the

movement gained new confidence in the postwar period, and arguably reached its zenith during the period of the Vietnam War.

However, we must now turn back to the opening of the twentieth century, to consider an earlier reaction against liberalism, which is especially associated with the name of Karl Barth: neo-orthodoxy.

Neo-orthodoxy

World War I witnessed a growing disillusionment with, although not a final rejection of, the liberal theology which had come to be associated with Schleiermacher and his followers. A number of writers argued that Schleiermacher had, in effect, reduced Christianity to little more than religious experience, thus making it a human-centered rather than a God-centered affair. The war, it was argued, destroyed the credibility of such an approach. Liberal theology seemed to be about human values – and how could these be taken seriously, if they led to global conflicts on such a massive scale? By stressing the “otherness” of God, writers such as Karl Barth (1886–1968) believed that they could escape from the doomed human-centered theology of liberalism.

These ideas were given systematic exposition by Barth in the *Church Dogmatics* (1936–69), one of the most significant theological achievements of the twentieth century. Barth did not live to finish this enterprise, so that his exposition of the doctrine of redemption is incomplete. The primary theme which resonates throughout the *Dogmatics* is the need to take seriously the self-revelation of God in Christ through Scripture. Although this might seem to be little more than a reiteration of themes already firmly associated with Calvin or Luther, Barth brought a degree of creativity and rigor to his task which firmly established him as a major thinker in his own right.

The work is divided into five volumes, each of which is further subdivided. Volume I deals with the Word of God – for Barth, the source and starting point of Christian faith and Christian theology alike. Volume II deals with the doctrine of God, and volume III with the doctrine of the creation. Volume IV deals with the doctrine of reconciliation (or, perhaps one might say, “atonement”; the German term *Versöhnung* has both meanings). The final incomplete volume V considers the doctrine of redemption.

Apart from the predictable (and relatively non-informative) term “Barthianism,” two terms have been used to describe the approach associated with Barth. The first of these terms is “dialectical theology,” which takes up the idea, found especially in Barth’s 1919 commentary on Romans, of a “dialectic between time and eternity,” or a “dialectic between

God and humanity.” The term draws attention to Barth’s characteristic insistence that there is a contradiction or dialectic, rather than a continuity, between God and humanity. The second term is “neo-orthodoxy,” which draws attention to the affinity between Barth and the writings of the period of Reformed orthodoxy, especially during the seventeenth century. In many ways, Barth can be regarded as entering into dialogue with several leading Reformed writers of this period.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Barth’s approach is his “theology of the Word of God.” According to Barth, theology is a discipline that seeks to keep the proclamation of the Christian church faithful to its foundation in Jesus Christ, as he has been revealed to us in Scripture. Theology is not a response to the human situation or to human questions; it is a response to the Word of God, which demands a response on account of its intrinsic nature.

Neo-orthodoxy became a significant presence in North American theology during the 1930s, especially through the writings of Reinhold Niebuhr and others, which criticized the optimistic assumptions of much liberal Protestant social thinking of the time.

Neo-orthodoxy has been criticized at a number of points. The following are of especial importance:

1. Its emphasis upon the transcendence and “otherness” of God leads to God being viewed as distant and potentially irrelevant. It has often been suggested that this leads to extreme skepticism.
2. There is a certain circularity to the claim of neo-orthodoxy to be based only upon divine revelation, in that this cannot be checked out by anything other than an appeal to that same revelation. In other words, there are no recognized external reference points by which neo-orthodoxy’s truth claims can be verified. This has led many of its critics to suggest that it is a form of fideism – that is to say, a belief system which is impervious to any criticism from outside its own boundaries.
3. Neo-orthodoxy has no helpful response to those who are attracted to other religions, which it is obliged to dismiss as distortions and perversions. Other theological approaches are able to account for the existence of such religions, and place them in relation to the Christian faith.

Ressourcement, or, la nouvelle théologie

During the broad period 1930–50, traditional Catholic theology in western Europe found itself facing a series of challenges that its traditional, rather scholastic approaches were ill equipped to meet. Many writers in Germany, Italy, Belgium, and the Netherlands attempted to rise to this challenge, developing new approaches to theology that maintained what was good about the tradition while at the same time allowing it to engage with the questions of the day. Yet it was in France that these questions were pursued with particular energy and insight. The French theological revival of these years included some of the greatest names in twentieth-century Catholic scholarship – writers such as Henri de Lubac, Jean Daniélou, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Yves Congar, Marie-Dominique Chenu, and Louis Bouyer.

Why France? Partly because of the urgency of the question in that country. France had a long tradition of secularism, going back to the French Revolution. Yet the theological soul searching that we see in this movement was sparked off by the publication of Jean Godin's book *France – A Nation of Mission?* in 1943. This book argued that Catholicism was losing its influence on young people and the working classes. The Catholic church was galvanized: the years 1946–7 witnessed an unprecedented level of institutional self-examination and renewal.

Part of that process of renewal was the movement known as *la ressourcement* by its advocates, and *la nouvelle théologie* ("the new theology") by its critics (who wished to dismiss it as uncritical innovation). A key theme of this "ressourcement" was a return to the sources, traditions, and creeds of the early church. Many regard the manifesto of the movement as being a 1946 article by the young Jesuit writer Jean Daniélou, entitled "The Present Orientations of Religious Thought." A chasm, he declared, had opened up between systematic theology and biblical **exegesis**. The result was inevitable: the church had developed a theology that was divorced from biblical studies on the one hand, and the life and spirituality of the church on the other.

A term used to refer to the process of unfolding the meaning of the Bible, especially in preaching.

Daniélou's solution to this difficulty was simple, and not unlike that used by Christian humanists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. To equip the church to confront the challenges of the modern age, it must rediscover the riches of the church's 2000 years of history by returning to the very fountainhead of the Christian tradition. The French term "*ressourcement*" (which is difficult to translate adequately into English) encapsulates this program of "rediscovering and reappropriating the original sources of theology."

Such theologians did not see this program simply as a repetition of what had been said in the past. Rather, the tradition was interrogated and interpreted in the light of the questions of the present. As Charles Péguy noted, the modern crisis of faith demanded "a new and deeper sounding of ancient, inexhaustible, and common resources." Like the humanists of the Renaissance, the advocates of this reform found themselves advocating what seemed to be a paradox: in order to advance in theology, one first has to go backward. "If theological progress is sometimes necessary, it is never possible unless you go back to the beginning and start all over again" (Étienne Gilson).

Nor did these theologians see theological scholarship as of purely academic importance. The *ressourcement* envisaged and advocated by these writers was not primarily a work of academic scholarship but rather a work of religious revitalization. Indeed, many placed the emphasis on the pastoral orientation of theology, and the need for theology to connect with the situation of ordinary people. This "primacy of the pastoral" (Yves Congar) extended to worship, addressing the widespread perception that a sense of God's transcendent mystery had been eroded by a rationalistic theology. The recovery of the transcendent in theology was seen as an integral aspect of the program of *ressourcement*, and helps us understand why the movement emphasized the link between theology and spirituality.

Feminism

Feminism has come to be a significant component of modern western culture. At its heart, feminism is a global movement working toward the emancipation of women, arguing for gender equality and a right understanding of the relationship between women and men to be affirmed by contemporary theology and practice. The older term for the movement – “women’s liberation” – expressed the fact that it is at heart a liberation movement directing its efforts toward achieving equality for women in modern society, especially through the removal of obstacles – including beliefs, values, and attitudes – that hinder that process.

Feminist theology thus aims to understand and criticize male-dominated tradition and to challenge androcentric images of God and humanity. The movement has become increasingly heterogeneous in recent years, partly on account of a willingness to recognize a diversity of approaches on the part of women within different cultures and ethnic groupings. Thus the religious writings of black women in North America are increasingly coming to be referred to as “black womanist theology.”

Feminism has come into conflict with Christianity (as it has with most religions) on account of the perception that religions treat women as second-rate human beings, both in terms of the roles which those religions allocate to women, and the manner in which they are understood to image God. The writings of Simone de Beauvoir (1908–86) – such as *The Second Sex* (1945) – developed such ideas at length. A number of post-Christian feminists, including Mary Daly (1928–2010) in *Beyond God the Father* (1973) and Daphne Hampson (b.1944) in *Theology and Feminism* (1990), argue that Christianity, with its male symbols for God, its male savior figure, and its long history of male leaders and thinkers, is biased against women, and therefore incapable of being salvaged. Women, they urge, should leave its oppressive environment. Others, such as Carol Christ in *Laughter of Aphrodite* (1987) and Naomi Ruth Goldenberg in *Changing of the Gods* (1979), argue that women may find religious emancipation by recovering the ancient goddess religions (or inventing new ones), and abandoning traditional Christianity altogether.

Yet the feminist evaluation of Christianity is far from as monolithically hostile toward Christianity as these writers might suggest. Feminist writers

have stressed how women have been active in the shaping and development of the Christian tradition, from the New Testament onward, and have exercised significant leadership roles throughout Christian history. Indeed, many feminist writers have shown the need to reappraise the Christian past, giving honor and recognition to a large group of faithful women, whose practice, defense, and proclamation of their faith had hitherto passed unnoticed by much of the Christian church and its (mainly male) historians. Sarah Coakley (b.1951) is an important voice in such discussions. In her *Powers and Submissions* (2002), Coakley explores how feminism can be used constructively to provide a new appreciation for certain early church figures, without losing sight of its critical and corrective role.

The most significant contribution of feminism to Christian thought may be argued to lie in its challenge to traditional theological formulations. These, it is argued, are often patriarchal (that is, they reflect a belief in domination by males) and sexist (that is, they are biased against women). The following areas of theology are especially significant in this respect.

The maleness of God

The persistent use of male pronouns for God within the Christian tradition is a target of criticism by many feminist writers. It is argued that the use of female pronouns is at least as logical as the use of their male counterparts, and might go some way toward correcting an excessive emphasis upon male role models for God. In her *Sexism and God-Talk* (1983), Rosemary Radford Ruether (b.1936) suggests that the term “God/ess” is a politically correct designation for God, although the verbal clumsiness of the term is unlikely to enhance its appeal.

In her *Metaphorical Theology* (1982), Sallie McFague (b.1933) argues for the need to recover the idea of the metaphorical aspects of male models of God, such as “father”: analogies tend to stress the similarities between God and human beings; metaphors affirm that, amidst these similarities, there are significant dissimilarities between God and humans (for example, in the realm of gender).

The nature of sin

Many feminist writers have suggested that notions of sin as pride, ambition, or excessive self-esteem are fundamentally male in orientation. This, it is

argued, does not correspond to the experience of women, who tend to experience sin as lack of pride, lack of ambition, and lack of self-esteem. Of particular importance in this context is the feminist appeal to the notion of non-competitive relationships, which avoids the patterns of low self-esteem and passivity which have been characteristic of traditional female responses to male-dominated society. This point is made with particular force by Judith Plaskow (b.1947) in *Sex, Sin and Grace* (1980), a penetrating critique of Reinhold Niebuhr's theology from a feminist perspective, although the earlier work of Valerie Saiving anticipated some of these themes.

Pastoral theology

In the last few decades there has been increased interest in pastoral (or practical) theology, which explores how the Christian tradition feeds into pastoral care (pp. 7–8). Feminist writers have noted how much work in this area has been undertaken from a male perspective, and offered alternative or supplementary approaches. In her influential work *Transforming Practice* (1993), Elaine Graham (b.1959) points out how a feminist pastoral theology offers important corrections to traditional models. Instead of relying upon somewhat abstract scientific and medical models of care, feminist reconstruction of pastoral theology seeks to use sacrament, prayer, sermon, and community life as sources for healing and community.

The person of Christ

A number of feminist writers, most notably Rosemary Radford Ruether in *Sexism and God-Talk*, have suggested that Christology is the ultimate ground of much sexism within Christianity. In her *Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology* (1990), Elizabeth Johnson (b.1941) has explored the manner in which the maleness of Jesus has been the subject of theological abuse, and suggests appropriate correctives. Two areas of especial importance may be noted.

First, the maleness of Christ has sometimes been used as the theological foundation for the belief that only the male human may adequately image God, or that only males provide appropriate role models or analogies for God. Second, the maleness of Christ has sometimes been used as the foundation for a network of beliefs concerning norms within humanity. It

has been argued, on the basis of the maleness of Christ, that the norm of humanity is the male, with the female being somehow a second-rate, or less than ideal, human being. Thomas Aquinas, who describes women as misbegotten males (apparently on the basis of an obsolete Aristotelian biology), illustrates this trend, which has important implications for issues of leadership within the church.

In responding to these points, feminist writers have argued that the maleness of Christ is a contingent aspect of his identity, on the same level as his being Jewish. It is a contingent element of his historical reality, not an essential aspect of his identity. Thus it cannot be allowed to become the basis of the domination of females by males, any more than it legitimates the domination of Gentiles by Jews, or plumbers by carpenters.

Liberation theology

The term “liberation theology” is now used to refer to the distinct form of theology which has its origins in the Latin American situation in the 1960s and 1970s. The same term could, in theory, be applied to any theology which is addressed to or deals with oppressive situations. In this sense, feminist theology could be regarded as a form of liberation theology, as the older term “women’s liberation” suggests. Equally, black theology was particularly concerned with the issue of liberation during the civil rights movement in the United States. Some classical works on black theology and feminist liberation theology were actually published at about the same time as the first major statements of Latin American liberation theology. Nevertheless, the phrase “liberation theology” is now generally used to refer to the specifically Latin American embodiment of a theology that focuses on human liberation.

The origins of this movement are usually traced back to 1968, when the Catholic bishops of Latin America gathered for a congress at Medellín, Colombia. This meeting – often known as CELAM II – sent shock waves throughout the region by acknowledging that the church had often sided with oppressive governments in the region, and declaring that in future it would be on the side of the poor.

This pastoral and political stance was soon complemented by a solid theological foundation. In his *Theology of Liberation* (1971), the Peruvian theologian Gustavo Gutiérrez (b.1928) introduced the characteristic themes that would become definitive of the movement, and which we shall explore presently. Other writers of note include the Brazilian Leonardo Boff (b.1938), the Uruguayan Juan Luis Segundo (1925–96), and the Argentinian José Miguéz Bonino (b.1924). This last theologian is unusual in one respect, in that he is a Protestant (more precisely, a Methodist) voice in a conversation dominated by Roman Catholic writers.

The basic themes of Latin American liberation theology may be summarized as follows:

1. Liberation theology is oriented toward the poor and oppressed. “The poor are the authentic theological source for understanding Christian truth and practice” (Jon Sobrino). In the Latin American situation, the church is on the side of the poor: “God is clearly and unequivocally on

the side of the poor” (Bonino). The fact that God is on the side of the poor leads to a further insight: the poor occupy a position of especial importance in the interpretation of the Christian faith. All Christian theology and mission must begin with the “view from below,” with the sufferings and distress of the poor.

2. Liberation theology involves critical reflection on practice. As Gutiérrez puts it, theology is a “critical reflection on Christian praxis in the light of the word of God.” Theology is not, and should not be, detached from social involvement or political action. Whereas classical western theology regarded action as the result of reflection, liberation theology inverts the order: action comes first, followed by critical reflection. “Theology has to stop explaining the world, and start transforming it” (Bonino). True knowledge of God can never be disinterested or detached, but comes in and through commitment to the cause of the poor. There is a fundamental rejection of the Enlightenment view that commitment is a barrier to knowledge.

This last point has caused debate, on account of the movement’s apparent indebtedness to Marxist theory. Liberation theologians have defended their use of Marx on two grounds. First, Marxism is seen as a “tool of social analysis” (Gutiérrez), which allows insights to be gained concerning the present state of Latin American society, and the means by which the appalling situation of the poor may be remedied. Second, it provides a political program by which the present unjust social system may be dismantled, and a more equitable society created. In practice, liberation theology is intensely critical of capitalism and affirmative of socialism. Liberation theologians have noted Thomas Aquinas’s use of Aristotle in his theological method, and argued that they are merely doing the same thing – using a secular philosopher to give substance to fundamentally Christian beliefs. For, it must be stressed, liberation theology declares that God’s preference for and commitment to the poor is a fundamental aspect of the gospel, not some bolt-on option arising from the Latin American situation or based purely in Marxist political theory.

It will be clear that liberation theology is of major significance to recent theological debate. Two key theological issues may be considered as an illustration of its impact.

Biblical hermeneutics

Scripture is read as a narrative of liberation. Particular emphasis is laid upon the liberation of Israel from bondage in Egypt, the prophets' denunciation of oppression, and Jesus' proclamation of the gospel to the poor and outcast. Scripture is read not from a standpoint of wishing to understand the gospel, but out of a concern to apply its liberating insights to the Latin American situation. Western academic theology has tended to regard this approach with some impatience, believing that it has no place for the considered insights of biblical scholarship concerning the interpretation of such passages.

The nature of salvation

Liberation theology has tended to equate salvation with liberation, and stressed the social, political, and economic aspects of salvation. The movement has laid particular emphasis upon the notion of "structural sin," noting that it is society, rather than individuals, that is corrupted and requires redemption. To its critics, liberation theology has reduced salvation to a purely worldly affair, and neglected its transcendent and eternal dimensions.

Black theology

“Black theology,” a movement which concerned itself with ensuring that the realities of black experience were represented at the theological level, became especially significant in the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. The first major evidence of the move toward theological emancipation within the American black community dates from 1964, with the publication of Joseph Washington’s *Black Religion*, a powerful affirmation of the distinctiveness of black religion within the North American context. Washington emphasized the need for integration and assimilation of black theological insights within mainstream Protestantism; however, this approach was largely swept to one side with the appearance of Albert Cleage’s *Black Messiah*. Cleage (1911–2000), pastor of the Shrine of the Black Madonna in Detroit, urged black people to liberate themselves from white theological oppression. Arguing that Scripture was written by black Jews, Cleage claimed that the gospel of a black Messiah had been perverted by Paul in his attempt to make it acceptable to Europeans. Despite the considerable overstatements within the work, *Black Messiah* came to be a rallying point for black Christians determined to discover and assert their distinctive identity.

The movement made several decisive affirmations of its theological distinctiveness during 1969. The “Black Manifesto” issued at the Inter-Religious Foundation for Community Organization meeting in Detroit, Michigan, placed the issue of the black experience firmly on the theological agenda. The statement by the National Committee of Black Churchmen emphasized the theme of liberation as a central motif of black theology:

Black Theology is a theology of black liberation. It seeks to plumb the black condition in the light of God’s revelation in Jesus Christ, so that the black community can see that the gospel is commensurate with the achievement of black humanity. Black Theology is a theology of “blackness.” It is the affirmation of black humanity that emancipates black people from white racism, thus providing authentic freedom for both white and black people.

Although there are obvious affinities between this statement and the aims and emphases of Latin American liberation theology, it must be stressed that, at this stage, there was no formal interaction between the two

movements. Liberation theology arose primarily within the Roman Catholic church in South America, whereas black theology tended to arise within black Protestant communities in North America.

The most significant writer within the movement is generally agreed to be James H. Cone (b.1938), whose *Black Theology of Liberation* (1970) appealed to the central notion of a God who is concerned for the black struggle for liberation. Noting the strong preference of Jesus for the oppressed, Cone argued that “God was black” – that is, identified with the oppressed. However, Cone’s use of Barthian categories was criticized: why, it was asked, should a black theologian use the categories of a white theology in articulating the black experience? Why had he not made fuller use of black history and culture? In later works, Cone responded to such criticisms by making a more pervasive appeal to “the black experience” as a central resource in black theology. Nevertheless, Cone has continued to maintain a **Barthian** emphasis upon the centrality of Christ as the self-revelation of God (while identifying him as “the black Messiah”), and the authority of Scripture in interpreting human experience in general.

Adjective used to describe the theological outlook of the Swiss theologian Karl Barth; noted chiefly for its emphasis upon the priority of revelation and its focus upon Jesus Christ.

Postliberalism

One of the most significant developments in theology since about 1980 has been a growing skepticism over the plausibility of a liberal worldview. The emergence of postliberalism is widely regarded as one of the most important aspects of western theology since 1980. The movement had its origins in the United States, and was initially associated with Yale Divinity School, and particularly with theologians such as Hans Frei (1922–88), Paul Holmer (1916–2004), and George Lindbeck (b.1923). While it is not strictly correct to speak of a “Yale school” of theology, there are nevertheless clear “family resemblances” between a number of the approaches to theology to emerge from Yale during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Since then, postliberal trends have become well established within North American and British academic theology. Its central foundations are narrative approaches to theology, such as those developed by Hans Frei, and the schools of social interpretation which stress the importance of culture and language in the generation and interpretation of experience and thought.

Building upon the work of philosophers such as Alasdair MacIntyre (b.1929), postliberalism rejects both the traditional Enlightenment appeal to a “universal rationality” and the liberal assumption of an immediate religious experience common to all humanity. Arguing that all thought and experience is historically and socially mediated, postliberalism bases its theological program upon a return to religious traditions, whose values are inwardly appropriated. Postliberalism is thus anti-foundational (in that it rejects the notion of a universal foundation of knowledge), communitarian (in that it appeals to the values, experiences, and language of a community, rather than prioritizing the individual), and historicist (in that it insists upon the importance of traditions and their associated historical communities in the shaping of experience and thought).

The philosophical roots of this movement are complex. Within the movement, particular appreciation can be discerned for the style of approach associated with the philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre, as noted above, which places an emphasis on the relation between narrative, community, and the moral life. In this respect, postliberalism reintroduces a strong emphasis on the particularity of the Christian faith, in reaction against the strongly homogenizing tendencies of liberalism, in its abortive

attempt to make theory (that all religions are saying the same thing) and observation (that the religions are different) coincide.

Liberal critics of postliberalism have argued that it represents a lapse into a “ghetto ethic” or some form of “**fideism**” or “tribalism,” on account of its retreat from universal norms of value and rationality. Postliberals respond to their liberal critics by arguing that the latter seem unable to accept that the Enlightenment is over, and that any notion of a “universal language” or “common human experience” is simply a fiction, like – to use Hans-Georg Gadamer’s famous analogy – Robinson Crusoe’s imaginary island.

Understanding of Christian theology that refuses to accept the need for criticism or evaluation from sources outside the Christian faith itself.

The most significant statement of the postliberal theological agenda remains George Lindbeck’s *Nature of Doctrine* (1984). Rejecting “cognitive–propositional” approaches to doctrine as premodern, and liberal “experiential–expressive” theories as failing to take account of both human experiential diversity and the mediating role of culture in human thought and experience, Lindbeck develops what he terms a “cultural–linguistic” approach which embodies the leading features of postliberalism.

The cultural–linguistic approach denies that there is some universal unmediated human experience which exists apart from human language and culture. Rather, it stresses that the heart of religion lies in living within a specific historical religious tradition, and interiorizing its ideas and values. This tradition rests upon a historically mediated set of ideas, for which the narrative is an especially suitable means of transmission.

Such ideas can be seen in an earlier work of importance to the emergence of postliberalism – Paul Holmer’s *Grammar of Faith* (1978). For Holmer, Christianity possesses a central grammar that regulates the structure and shape of Christian “language games.” This language is not invented or imposed by theology; it is already inherent within the biblical paradigms upon which theology is ultimately dependent. The task of theology is thus to discern these intrabiblical rules (such as the manner in which God is worshiped and spoken about), not to impose extrabiblical rules. For Holmer, one of liberalism’s most fundamental flaws was its attempt to “reinterpret” or “restate” biblical concepts, which inevitably degenerated into the harmonization of Scripture with the spirit of the age. “Continuous redoing of the Scripture to fit the age is only a sophisticated and probably invisible

bondage to the age rather than the desire to win the age for God.” Theology is grounded on the intrabiblical paradigm, which it is obliged to describe and apply as best it can. To affirm that theology has a regulatory authority is not to imply that it can regulate Scripture, but to acknowledge that a distinctive pattern of regulation already exists within the biblical material, which theology is to uncover and articulate.

Postliberalism is of particular importance in relation to two areas of Christian theology.

Systematic theology

Theology is understood to be primarily a descriptive discipline, concerned with the exploration of the normative foundations of the Christian tradition, which are mediated through the scriptural narrative of Jesus Christ. Truth can be, at least in part, equated with fidelity to the distinctive doctrinal traditions of the Christian faith. This has caused critics of postliberalism to accuse it of retreating from the public arena into some kind of Christian ghetto. If Christian theology, as postliberalism suggests, is intrasystemic (that is, concerned with the exploration of the internal relationships of the Christian tradition), its validity is to be judged with reference to its own internal standards, rather than some publicly agreed or universal criteria. Once more, this has prompted criticism from those who suggest that theology ought to have external criteria, subject to public scrutiny, by which its validity can be tested.

Christian ethics

Stanley Hauerwas (b.1940) is widely regarded as the most distinguished writer to explore postliberal approaches to ethics. Rejecting the Enlightenment idea of a universal set of moral ideals or values, Hauerwas argues that Christian ethics is concerned with the identification of the moral vision of a historical community (the church), and with bringing that vision to actualization in the lives of its members. Thus ethics is intrasystemic, in that it concerns the study of the internal moral values of a community. To be moral is to identify the moral vision of a specific historical community, to appropriate its moral values, and to practice them within that community.

Radical orthodoxy

Finally, we may turn to consider a movement that has recently arisen within English-language theology, which has generated some important discussion and debate. The term “radical orthodoxy” is used to refer to a broad approach to theology which emerged in the 1990s, associated with writers such as John Milbank (b.1952), Catherine Pickstock (b.1952), and Graham Ward (b.1955), all of whom were originally based at Cambridge University. Its ideas are set out in works such as John Milbank’s *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (1993), and especially the edited volume *Radical Orthodoxy: A New Theology* (1999).

The agenda of the movement is complex and sophisticated, and is perhaps best understood in terms of the need for Christianity to construct its own alternatives to both modernity and postmodernity. Milbank, Pickstock, and Ward hope to articulate a comprehensive Christian perspective that will both supersede and replace secularisms, whether modern and postmodern, finding in writers such as Augustine of Hippo models worthy of emulation. While it is still too early to determine how successful the movement will be, it is clear that it will be the subject of continued discussion in the near future.

Key Names, Words, and Phrases

Black theology
charismatic movement
dialectical theology
Enlightenment
evangelicalism
feminism
Great Awakening
liberalism
liberation theology
Marxism
modernism
neo-orthodoxy
postliberalism
postmodernism
quest of the historical Jesus
Romanticism

Questions

1. What are the main features of the Enlightenment?
2. Which areas of Christian theology were especially affected by the ideas of the Enlightenment? Why?
3. Summarize some of the features of the following movements: liberal Protestantism, neo-orthodoxy, evangelicalism, liberation theology.
4. With which theological movements would you associate the following individuals: Karl Barth, Leonardo Boff, James Cone, Stanley Hauerwas, Yves Congar, Rosemary Radford Ruether, F. D. E. Schleiermacher?
5. Many recent theological movements represent “theologies of retrieval.” Why has there been such interest in recovering older ideas in the present?

Case Studies

Case study 4.1 The quests of the historical Jesus

The modern period has seen a series of developments of fundamental importance to **Christology**, which have no real parallel in previous Christian history. The rise of a rationalist worldview saw a series of challenges to traditional understandings of the identity and significance of Jesus, without any real parallel with earlier times. In view of the importance of these developments, they are considered here in some detail. Earlier case studies explored the development of classical Christology, which continues to be a major aspect of theological reflection within the church. The present case study explores this issue further, focusing on three “quests of the historical Jesus” – the “original,” “new,” and “third” quests.

Section of Christian theology dealing with the identity of Jesus Christ, particularly the question of the relation of his human and divine natures.

The term “quest” has strongly romantic overtones, suggesting an affinity with the great Arthurian “quest for the Holy Grail.” In fact, the term was introduced into the English-language discussion of the (much more prosaically entitled) “historical Jesus question” by the translator of Albert Schweitzer’s masterpiece of 1906 (published in English translation, 1911). A rough English translation of the German title is: “From Reimarus to Wrede: On the History of the Question of the Historical Jesus.” The English translator, doubtless concerned lest such an uninspiring title featuring two unknown German scholars might damage its sales potential, transferred their names to a subtitle, and inserted a new title: “The Quest of the Historical Jesus: A Study of Its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede.” The term was neither used nor intended to be used by Schweitzer; nevertheless, it passed into general use, and continues to be used to this day.

The original quest for the historical Jesus

Both Deism and the German Enlightenment developed the thesis that there was a serious discrepancy between the real Jesus of history and the New Testament interpretation of his significance. Underlying the New Testament portrait of the supernatural redeemer of humanity lurked a simple human figure, a glorified teacher of common sense. While a supernatural redeemer was unacceptable to Enlightenment rationalism, the idea of an enlightened moral teacher was not. This idea, developed with particular rigor by Reimarus, suggested that it was possible to go behind the New Testament accounts of Jesus and uncover a simpler, more human Jesus, who would be acceptable to the new spirit of the age. And so the quest for the real and more credible “Jesus of history” began. Although this quest would ultimately end in failure, the later Enlightenment regarded this “quest” as holding the key to the credibility of Jesus within the context of a rational natural religion. Jesus’ moral authority resided in the quality of his teaching and religious personality, rather than in the unacceptable orthodox suggestion that he was God incarnate. And it is this suggestion that underlies the celebrated “quest of the historical Jesus,” to which we now turn.

The original “quest of the historical Jesus” was based upon the presupposition that there was a radical gulf between the historical figure of Jesus and the interpretation which the Christian church had placed upon him. The “historical Jesus,” who lies behind the New Testament, was a simple religious teacher; the “Christ of faith” was a misrepresentation of this simple figure by early church writers. By going back to the historical Jesus, a more credible version of Christianity would result, stripped of all unnecessary and inappropriate dogmatic additions (such as the idea of the resurrection or the divinity of Christ). Such ideas, although frequently expressed by English Deists of the seventeenth century, received their classic statements in Germany in the late eighteenth century, especially through the posthumously published writings of Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694–1768).

Reimarus became increasingly convinced that both Judaism and Christianity rested upon fraudulent foundations, and conceived the idea of writing a major work which would bring this fact to public attention. The resulting work, *An Apology for the Rational Worshipper of God*, subjected the entire biblical canon to the standards of rationalist criticism. However, reluctant to cause any controversy, he did not publish the work. It remained

in manuscript form until his death. At some point, however, the manuscript fell into the hands of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–81), who decided to have it published as a selection of extracts from the work. These were published as “fragments of an unknown writer” in 1774, and promptly caused a sensation. The work, which is now generally known as the “Wolfenbüttel Fragments,” included a sustained attack on the historicity of the resurrection

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–81). A significant representative of the German Enlightenment, noted for his strongly rationalist approach to Christian theology.

The final fragment, entitled “On the Aims of Jesus and His Disciples,” concerned the nature of our knowledge of Jesus Christ, and raised the question of whether the gospel accounts of Jesus had been tampered with by the early Christians. Reimarus argued that there was a radical difference between the beliefs and intentions of Jesus himself and those of the apostolic church. Jesus’ language and images of God were, according to Reimarus, those of a Jewish apocalyptic visionary, with a radically limited chronological and political reference and relevance. Jesus accepted the late Jewish expectation of a Messiah who would deliver his people from Roman occupation, and believed that God would assist him in this task. His cry of dereliction on the Cross represented his final realization that he had been deluded and mistaken.

However, the disciples were not prepared to leave things like this. They invented the idea of a “spiritual redemption,” in the place of Jesus’ concrete political vision of an Israel liberated from foreign occupation. They invented the idea of the resurrection of Jesus in order to cover up the embarrassment caused by the death of Jesus. As a result, the disciples invented doctrines quite unknown to Jesus, such as his death being an atonement for human sin, adding such ideas to the biblical text to make it harmonize with their beliefs. As a result, the New Testament as we now have it is riddled with fraudulent interpolations. The real Jesus of history is concealed from us by the apostolic church, which substitutes a fictitious Christ of faith, the redeemer of humanity from sin.

In his masterly survey *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, Albert Schweitzer argued that Reimarus’s radical approach to the identity and significance of Jesus of Nazareth oblige modern Christians to “leave behind what we learned in the catechism regarding the metaphysical divine

sonship, the Trinity, and similar dogmatic conceptions, and go out into a wholly Jewish world of thought.” Jesus was, according to Reimarus, simply a Jewish political figure, who confidently expected to cause a decisive and victorious popular rising against Rome, and was shattered by his failure. The idea of the “resurrection” was invented to cover up this failure, leading to an essentially political message becoming spiritualized.

Although Reimarus found few, if any, followers at the time, he raised questions which would become of fundamental importance in subsequent years. In particular, his explicit distinction between the legitimate historical Jesus and the fictitious Christ of faith proved to be of enormous significance. The resulting “quest of the historical Jesus” arose as a direct result of the growing rationalist suspicion that the New Testament portrayal of Christ was a dogmatic invention. It was genuinely believed to be possible to reconstruct the real historical figure of Jesus, and disentangle him from the dogmatic ideas in which the apostles had clothed him.

The critique of the quest, 1890–1910

The illusion could not last. The most sustained challenge to the “life of Jesus” movement developed on a number of fronts during the final decade of the nineteenth century. Three main criticisms of the “religious personality” Christology of liberal Protestantism emerged in the two decades before World War I; we shall consider them individually.

Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965). This leading German Protestant theologian was noted particularly for his work on the historical Jesus, which led to a series of influential publications calling the validity and presuppositions of the “quest of the historical Jesus” into question. In 1913, he gave up his theological career to undertake medical work in Africa.

The apocalyptic critique, primarily associated with Johannes Weiss (1863–1914) and Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965), maintained that the strongly eschatological bias of Jesus’ proclamation of the Kingdom of God called the essentially Kantian liberal interpretation of the concept into question. In 1892, Johannes Weiss published *Jesus’ Proclamation of the Kingdom of God*. In this book, he argued that the idea of the “Kingdom of God” was understood by liberal Protestantism to mean the exercise of the moral life in society, or a supreme ethical ideal. In other words, it was conceived primarily as something subjective, inward, or spiritual, rather than in spatio-temporal terms. For Weiss himself, Ritschl’s concept of the Kingdom of God was essentially continuous with that of the Enlightenment. It was a static moral concept without eschatological overtones. The rediscovery of the eschatology of the preaching of Jesus called not merely this understanding of the Kingdom of God, but also the liberal portrait of Christ in general, into question. The “Kingdom of God” was thus not to be seen as a settled and static realm of liberal moral values, but as a devastating apocalyptic moment which overturned human values.

For Schweitzer, however, the whole character of Jesus’ ministry was conditioned and determined by his apocalyptic outlook. It is this idea that has become familiar to the English-speaking world as “thoroughgoing eschatology.” Where Weiss regarded a substantial part (but not all) of the teaching of Jesus as being conditioned by his radical eschatological expectations, Schweitzer argued for the need to recognize that every aspect of the teaching and attitudes of Jesus was determined by his eschatological outlook. Where Weiss believed that only part of Jesus’ preaching was

affected by this outlook, Schweitzer argued that the entire content of Jesus' message was consistently and thoroughly conditioned by apocalyptic ideas – ideas that were quite alien to the settled outlook of late nineteenth-century western Europe.

The result of this consistent eschatological interpretation of the person and message of Jesus of Nazareth was a portrait of Christ as a remote and strange figure, an apocalyptic and wholly unworldly figure, whose hopes and expectations finally came to nothing. Far from being an incidental and dispensable “husk” which could be discarded in order to establish the true “kernel” of Jesus' teaching concerning the universal fatherhood of God, eschatology was an essential and dominant characteristic of his outlook. Jesus thus appears to us as a strange figure from an alien first-century Jewish apocalyptic milieu, so that, in Schweitzer's famous words, “he comes to us as one unknown.”

The skeptical critique, associated particularly with William Wrede (1859–1906), called into question the historical status of our knowledge of Jesus in the first place. History and theology were closely intermingled in the **synoptic** narratives, and could not be disentangled. According to Wrede, Mark was painting a theological picture in the guise of history, imposing his theology upon the material which he had at his disposal. The Second Gospel was thus not objectively historical, but was actually a creative theological reinterpretation of history. It was thus impossible to go behind Mark's narrative and reconstruct the history of Jesus, since – if Wrede is right – this narrative is itself a theological construction, beyond which one cannot go. The “quest of the historical Jesus” thus comes to an end, in that it proves impossible to establish an historical foundation for the “real” Jesus of history. Wrede identified the following three radical and fatal errors underlying the Christologies of liberal Protestantism:

Term (derived from the Greek word *synopsis*, “summary”) used to refer to the first three gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke).

1. Although the liberal theologians appealed to later modifications of an earlier tradition when faced with unpalatable features of the synoptic accounts of Jesus (such as miracles, or obvious contradictions between sources), they failed to apply this principle consistently. In other words, they failed to realize that the later belief of the community had

exercised a normative influence over the evangelist at every stage of his work.

2. The motives of the evangelists were not taken into account. The liberal theologians tended simply to exclude those portions of the narratives they found unacceptable, and contented themselves with what remained. By doing so, they failed to take seriously the fact that the evangelist himself had a positive statement to make, and substituted for this something quite distinct. The first priority should be to approach the gospel narratives on their own terms, and to establish what the evangelist wished to convey to his readers.

3. The psychological approach to the gospel narratives tends to confuse what is conceivable with what actually took place, being based upon an inadequate foundation. In effect, liberal theologians tended to find in the Gospels precisely what they were seeking, on the basis of a “sort of psychological guesswork” which appeared to value emotive descriptions more than strict accuracy and certainty of knowledge.

Martin Kähler (1835–1912). A German Lutheran theologian with a particular concern for the theological aspects of New Testament criticism and interpretation. He was appointed to the chair of systematic theology at Halle in 1867. His most famous work is an essay of 1892, in which he subjected the theological assumptions of the “life of Jesus movement” to devastating criticism.

The dogmatic critique, due to Martin Kähler (1835–1912), challenged the theological significance of the reconstruction of the historical Jesus. The “historical Jesus” was an irrelevance to faith, which was based upon the “Christ of faith.” Kähler rightly saw that the dispassionate and provisional Jesus of the academic historian cannot become the object of faith. Yet how can Jesus Christ be the authentic basis and content of Christian faith when historical science can never establish certain knowledge concerning the historical Jesus? How can faith be based upon an historical event without being vulnerable to the charge of historical relativism? It was precisely these questions that Kähler addressed in his book *The So-Called Historical Jesus and the Historic Biblical Christ*.

Kähler states his two objectives in this work as follows: first, to criticize and reject the errors of the “life of Jesus” movement; and second, to establish the validity of an alternative approach. For Kähler:

The historical Jesus of modern writers conceals the living Christ from us. The Jesus of the “life of Jesus” movement is merely a modern example of a brain-child of the human imagination, no better than the notorious dogmatic Christ of Byzantine Christology. They are both equally far removed from the real Christ. In this respect, historicism is just as arbitrary, just as humanly arrogant, just as speculative and “faithlessly gnostic,” as that dogmatism which was itself considered modern in its own day.

Kähler concedes immediately that the “life of Jesus” movement was completely correct in so far as it contrasted the biblical witness to Christ with an abstract dogmatism. He nevertheless insists upon its futility, a view summarized in his well-known statement to the effect that the entire life of the Jesus movement is a blind alley. His reasons for making this assertion are complex.

The most fundamental reason is that Christ must be regarded as what Kähler terms a “supra-historical” rather than an “historical” figure, so that the critical historical method cannot be applied in his case. The critical historical method could not deal with the supra-historical (and hence supra-human) characteristics of Jesus, and hence was obliged to ignore or deny them. In effect, the critical historical method could only lead to an Arian or Ebionite Christology, on account of its latent dogmatic presuppositions. This point, made frequently throughout the essay, is developed with particular force in relation to the psychological interpretation of the personality of Jesus, and the related question concerning the use of the principle of analogy in the critical historical method.

Kähler notes that the psychological interpretation of the personality of Jesus is dependent upon the (unrecognized) presupposition that the distinction between ourselves and Jesus is one of degree rather than kind, which Kähler suggests must be criticized on dogmatic grounds. More significantly, Kähler challenged the principle of analogy in the interpretation of the New Testament portrayal of Christ in general which inevitably led to Jesus being treated as analogous to modern human beings, and hence to a reduced Christology. If it is assumed from the outset that Jesus is an ordinary human being, who differs from other humans only in degree and not in nature, then this assumption will be read back into the biblical texts, and dictate the resulting conclusion – that Jesus of Nazareth is a human being who differs from us only in degree.

Second, Kähler argued that “we do not possess any sources for a life of Jesus which an historian could accept as reliable and adequate.” This is not to say that the sources are unreliable and inadequate for the purposes of faith. Rather, Kähler wants to emphasize that the gospels are not the accounts of disinterested, impartial observers, but rather accounts of the faith of believers, which cannot be isolated, in either form or content, from that faith: the gospel accounts “are not the reports of alert impartial observers, but are throughout the testimonies and confessions of believers in Christ.” In that “it is only through these accounts that we are able to come into contact with him,” it will be clear that the “biblical portrait of Christ” is of decisive importance for faith.

What is important for Kähler is not who Christ was, but what he presently does for believers. The “Jesus of history” lacks the soteriological significance of the “Christ of faith.” The thorny problems of Christology may therefore be left behind in order to develop what he termed “soterology,” and defined as “the knowledge of faith concerning the person of the savior.” In effect, Kähler argues that the “life of Jesus” movement has done little more than create a fictitious and pseudo-scientific Christ, devoid of existential significance. For Kähler, “the real Christ is the preached Christ.” Christian faith is not based upon this historical Jesus, but upon the existentially significant and faith-evoking figure of the Christ of faith.

Others took similar views. The German historian of dogma Friedrich Loofs (1858–1928), for example, argued that theological reflection about the person of Jesus of Nazareth had to take seriously historical research. Yet it was also necessary to realize that there was more to the significance of Jesus of Nazareth than what historical research could disclose:

Faith will, therefore, have to oppose the science of history, if the latter, unwilling to recognize that Jesus stands beyond the reach of its standards, thinks that it has to eliminate those traits in the picture of Jesus which surpass the ordinary bounds of human life. Faith will have to claim – and it has a right to do so – that historical science shall acknowledge that it cannot say the last word about Jesus. ... [Jesus] was a real man, and yet not a man like all others, a man in whose case the analogy of all other human experience is of no use, a unique man among all the children of God, (or sons of God as the New Testament says,) the unique one, the only begotten son.

Concerns such as these about the limits of the historical method gradually came to dominate the theological scene, and may be regarded as reaching their climax in the writings of Rudolf Bultmann, to which we now turn.

The retreat from history: Rudolf Bultmann

Bultmann regarded the entire enterprise of the historical reconstruction of Jesus as a blind alley. History was not of fundamental importance to Christology; it was merely necessary that Jesus existed, and that the Christian proclamation (which Bultmann terms the kerygma) is somehow grounded in his person. Bultmann thus famously reduced the entire historical aspect of Christology to a single word – “that.” It is necessary only to believe “that” Jesus Christ lies behind the gospel proclamation (or kerygma).

Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976). A German Lutheran writer, who was appointed to a chair of theology at Marburg in 1921. He is chiefly noted for his program of “demythologization” of the New Testament, and his use of existential ideas in the exposition of the twentieth-century meaning of the gospel.

For Bultmann, the Cross and the Resurrection are indeed historical phenomena (in that they took place within human history) – but they must be discerned by faith as divine acts. The Cross and the Resurrection are linked in the kerygma as the divine act of judgment and the divine act of salvation. It is this divine act which is of continuing significance, and not the historical phenomenon which acted as its bearer. The kerygma is thus not concerned with matters of historical fact, but with conveying the necessity of a decision on the part of its hearers, and thus transferring the eschatological moment from the past to the here and now of the proclamation itself. “Jesus Christ encounters us in the kerygma and nowhere else.” For Bultmann, the kerygma transmits the existential and transhistorical significance of Jesus:

The kerygma does not proclaim universal truths or a timeless idea – whether it is an idea of God or of the redeemer – but an historical fact. ... Therefore the kerygma is neither a vehicle for timeless ideas nor the mediator of historical information: what is of decisive importance is that the kerygma is Christ’s “that,” his “here and now,” a “here and now” which becomes present in the address itself.

It is therefore not possible to go behind the kerygma, using it as a “source” in order to reconstruct an “historical Jesus” with his “messianic consciousness,” his “inner life,” or his “heroism.” That would merely be “Christ according to the flesh,” who no longer exists. It is not the historical Jesus, but Jesus Christ, the one who preached, who is the Lord.

This radical move away from history alarmed many. How could anyone rest assured that Christology was properly grounded in the person and work of Jesus Christ? How could anyone begin to check out Christology, if the history of Jesus was an irrelevance? It seemed to an increasing number of writers, within the fields of both New Testament and dogmatic studies, that Bultmann had merely cut a Gordian knot, without resolving the serious historical issues at stake. For Bultmann, all that could be, and could be required to be, known about the historical Jesus was the fact that he existed. For the New Testament scholar Gerhard Ebeling (1912–2001), the person of the historical Jesus is the fundamental basis of Christology, and if it could be shown that Christology was a misinterpretation of the significance of the historical Jesus, Christology would be brought to an end. In this, Ebeling may be seen as expressing the concerns that underlie the “new quest of the historical Jesus,” to be discussed in the following section.

The new quest of the historical Jesus

Ebeling pointed to a fundamental deficiency in Bultmann’s Christology: its total lack of openness to investigation (perhaps “verification” is too strong a term) in the light of historical scholarship. Might not Christology rest upon a mistake? How can we rest assured that there is a justifiable transition from the preaching of Jesus to the preaching about Jesus? Ebeling develops criticisms which parallel those of Ernst Käsemann, but with a theological, rather than a purely historical, focus.

The “new quest of the historical Jesus” is generally regarded as having been inaugurated by Ernst Käsemann (1906–98), in a significant lecture of October 1953 on the problem of the historical Jesus. The full importance of this lecture only emerges if it is viewed in the light of the presuppositions and methods of the Bultmannian school up to this point. Käsemann concedes that the synoptic gospels are primarily theological documents, and that their theological statements are often expressed within the form of the

historical. In this, he endorses and recapitulates key axioms of the Bultmann school, here based upon insights of Kähler and Wrede.

Nevertheless, Käsemann immediately went on to qualify these assertions in a significant manner. Despite their obviously theological concerns, the evangelists nevertheless believed that they had access to historical information concerning Jesus of Nazareth, and that this historical information is expressed and embodied in the text of the synoptic gospels. The gospels include both the kerygma and historical narrative.

Building on this insight, Käsemann points to the need to explore the continuity between the preaching *of* Jesus and the preaching *about* Jesus. There is an obvious discontinuity between the earthly Jesus and the exalted and proclaimed Christ; yet a thread of continuity links them, in that the proclaimed Christ is already present, in some sense, in the historical Jesus. It must be stressed that Käsemann is not suggesting that a new inquiry should be undertaken concerning the historical Jesus in order to provide historical legitimation for the kerygma; still less is he suggesting that the discontinuity between the historical Jesus and the proclaimed Christ necessitates the deconstruction of the latter in terms of the former. Rather, Käsemann is pointing to the theological assertion of the identity of the earthly Jesus and the exalted Christ being historically grounded in the actions and preaching of Jesus of Nazareth. The theological affirmation is, Käsemann argues, dependent upon the historical demonstration that the kerygma concerning Jesus is already contained in a nutshell or embryonic form in the ministry of Jesus. In that the kerygma contains historical elements, it is entirely proper and necessary to inquire concerning the relation of the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith.

It will be clear that the “new quest of the historical Jesus” is qualitatively different from the discredited quest of the nineteenth century. Käsemann’s argument rests upon the recognition that the discontinuity between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith does not imply that they are unrelated entities, with the latter having no grounding or foundation in the former. Rather, the kerygma may be discerned in the actions and preaching of Jesus of Nazareth, so that there is a continuity between the preaching of Jesus and the preaching about Jesus. Where the older quest had assumed that the discontinuity between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith implied that the latter was potentially a fiction, who required to be reconstructed in

the light of objective historical investigation, Käsemann stresses that such reconstruction is neither necessary nor possible.

The growing realization of the importance of this point led to intensive interest developing in the question of the historical foundations of the kerygma. Four positions of interest may be noted:

1. Joachim Jeremias (1900–79), perhaps representing an extreme element in this debate, seemed to suggest that the basis of the Christian faith lies in what Jesus actually said and did, in so far as this can be established by theological scholarship. The first part of his *New Testament Theology* was thus devoted in its totality to the “proclamation of Jesus” as a central element of New Testament theology.

2. Käsemann himself identified the continuity between the historical Jesus and the kerygmatic Christ in their common declaration of the dawning of the eschatological Kingdom of God. Both in the preaching of Jesus and in the early Christian kerygma, the theme of the coming of the Kingdom is of major importance.

3. As we saw above, Gerhard Ebeling locates the continuity in the notion of the “faith of Jesus,” which he understands to be analogous to the “faith of Abraham” (described in Romans 4) – a prototypical faith, historically exemplified and embodied in Jesus of Nazareth, and proclaimed to be a contemporary possibility for believers.

4. Günter Bornkamm (1905–90) laid particular emphasis upon the note of authority evident in the ministry of Jesus. In Jesus, the actuality of God confronts humanity and calls it to a radical decision. Whereas Bultmann located the essence of Jesus’ preaching in the future coming of the Kingdom of God, Bornkamm shifted the emphasis from the future to the present confrontation of individuals with God through the person of Jesus. This theme of “confrontation with God” is evident in both the ministry of Jesus and the proclamation about Jesus, providing a major theological and historical link between the earthly Jesus and the proclaimed Christ.

The “new quest of the historical Jesus” was thus concerned to stress the continuity between the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. Whereas the “old quest” had the aim of discrediting the New Testament portrayal of Christ, the “new quest” ended up consolidating it, by stressing the

continuities between the preaching of Jesus himself and the church's preaching about Jesus. Since then, there have been other developments in the field. In the last two decades, particular attention has been directed toward exploring the relation between Jesus and his environment in first-century Judaism. This development, which is especially associated with English and American writers such as Geza Vermes and E. P. Sanders, has renewed interest in the Jewish background to Jesus, and further emphasized the importance of history in relation to Christology. The Bultmannian approach – which devalues the significance of history in Christology – is widely regarded as discredited, at least for the moment. We shall turn to consider this “third quest” in the concluding section of this case study.

The third quest

Since the general collapse of the “new quest” during the 1960s, a series of works have appeared offering reevaluations of the historical Jesus. The term “third quest” has often been applied to this group of works. The designation has been called into question by a number of writers, who point out that the works and scholars who are gathered together under this term do not have enough in common to categorize them in this way. For example, some writers within the group make an appeal to sources outside the New Testament, especially the Coptic Gospel of Thomas, in their analysis; others restrict their analysis to the New Testament materials, especially the synoptic gospels. Despite such reservations, the term has gained general acceptance, and it is therefore appropriate to include it in this survey.

The “original quest” approached the stories of Jesus in the light of its strongly rationalist presuppositions, and filtered out the miraculous aspects of the gospel narratives. The “new quest” tended to focus on the words of Jesus. The “third quest” seems to involve a focus on the healings and exorcisms of Jesus as indicative of the distinctive character of his mission and his understanding of his own goals. Although some scholars within the movement emphasize the Jewishness of Jesus (E. P. Sanders, Geza Vermes) others have suggested that certain distinctive features of his teaching and ministry originate from outside Judaism – for example, from within the Greco-Roman Cynical tradition (Dominic Crossan, Burton Mack).

Among significant contributions to the “third quest,” the following should be noted in particular:

1. John Dominic Crossan (b.1934) argues that Jesus was essentially a poor Jewish peasant with a particular concern to challenge the power structures of contemporary society. In his *The Historical Jesus* (1991) and *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* (1994), Crossan argues that Jesus broke down prevailing social conventions, especially through his table fellowship with sinners and social outcasts:

The historical Jesus was, then, a *peasant Jewish Cynic*. His peasant village was close enough to a Greco-Roman city like Sepphoris that sight and knowledge of Cynicism are neither inexplicable nor unlikely. But his work was among the farms and villages of Lower Galilee. His strategy, implicitly for himself and explicitly for his followers, was the combination of *free healing and common eating*, a religious and economic egalitarianism that negated alike and at once the hierarchical and patronal normalcies of Jewish religion and Roman power.

2. In books such as *Jesus: A New Vision* (1988) and *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time* (1994), Marcus L. Borg (b.1942) suggests that Jesus was a subversive sage concerned to renew Judaism in a manner which posed a powerful challenge to the ruling temple elite.

3. In his *Myth of Innocence* (1988) and *The Lost Gospel* (1993), Burton L. Mack – widely regarded as one of the most secular of recent New Testament scholars – argues that Jesus was an individualistic sage along the lines of a Cynic. As a “Hellenistic Cynic Sage” Jesus had little interest in specifically Jewish issues (such as the place of the Temple, or the role of the Law); rather, he was concerned to identify and mock the conventions of contemporary society.

4. E. P. Sanders (b.1937) insists that Jesus is to be seen as a prophetic figure who was concerned with the restoration of the Jewish people. In works such as *Jesus and Judaism* (1985) and *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (1993), Sanders suggests that Jesus envisaged an eschatological restoration of Israel. God would bring the present age to an end and usher in a new order focusing on a new temple, with Jesus himself acting as God’s representative.

5. N. T. (Tom) Wright (b.1948) is widely credited with introducing the term “the third quest.” Wright aims to steer a middle course between accepting the legitimate findings of scholarship, especially concerning

the Jewish background to Jesus, and maintaining continuity with the interpretations of Jesus within early Christian communities:

Either we “know” ahead of time that Jesus is “divine” (it is usually assumed that the force of this predicate is already understood), in which case the writing of the history of his life “must” reflect this fact. ... Alternatively, we commit ourselves to ruthless historical investigation, and expect, whether gladly or fearfully, that we will thereby “disprove,” or at least seriously undermine, orthodox theology. ... [Yet] rigorous history (i.e. open-ended investigation of actual events in first-century Palestine) and rigorous theology (i.e. open-ended investigation of what the word “god,” and hence the adjective “divine,” might actually refer to) belong together, and never more so than in discussion of Jesus.

On the basis of this brief analysis of some representatives of the “third quest,” it will be clear that, despite some shared themes, it generally lacks a coherent theological or historical core. There is significant disagreement concerning whether Jesus is to be seen against a Jewish or a Hellenistic background; about his attitude to the Jewish law and its religious institutions; his view of the future of Israel; and the personal significance of Jesus in relation to that future. Nevertheless, the term has found at least a degree of acceptance, despite its clear weaknesses, and it is likely to remain an integral part of scholarly discussion of this important issue.

It is too early to evaluate the outcomes of the “third quest,” but it is becoming clear that this more recent movement reflects a growing trend to treat the gospel as essentially reliable historical documents, which situate Jesus of Nazareth against the intellectual context of his day. In particular, the third quest tends to see Jesus of Nazareth as the proclaimer of the Kingdom of God, as understanding himself to be the Lord’s anointed, destined to rule Israel. This bears little relation to the “Jesus seminar,” which is increasingly seen as reflecting the assumptions and methods of earlier approaches to the question, particularly its questionable historical positivism.

Case study 4.2 The basis and nature of salvation

The question of how salvation is attained, and how that salvation is to be understood, has been the subject of discussion throughout Christian history. The patristic period witnessed the exploration of a variety of approaches, often with a particular concentration on the theme of Christ's victory over death or his transformation of corporate humanity through deification. The Middle Ages witnessed a new interest in the morality or legality of atonement (see case study 2.2). In the modern period, the discussion has continued. The present case study offers a survey of that discussion, beginning with a consideration of the relation between the doctrines of the person and work of Christ – or, to use more technical language, between Christology and soteriology.

The relation between Christology and soteriology

In the great works of systematic theology dating from the periods of high scholasticism and Protestant orthodoxy, a rigorous distinction was made between the “person of Christ” and the “work of Christ.” In the modern period, this distinction has been generally abandoned, on account of an increasing recognition of the inextricable connection of these two areas of theology. Christology and soteriology are increasingly being regarded as the two sides of one and the same coin. A number of considerations have led to this development.

The first is the influence of a Kantian epistemology. Kant argued that we can only know the “thing-in-itself” (*Ding-an-sich*) in terms of its effect upon us. If this general approach is translated to the cluster of issues centering upon the identity and significance of Jesus Christ, it would seem to follow that the essence or identity of Christ (i.e., Christology) cannot be separated from his effect or impact upon us (i.e., soteriology). This is the approach adopted by Albrecht Ritschl in his *Christian Doctrine of Justification and Reconciliation* (1874). Ritschl (1822–89) argued that it was improper to separate Christology and soteriology, in that we perceive “the nature and attributes, that is the determination of being, only in the

effect of a thing upon us, and we think of the nature and extent of its effect upon us as its essence.”

The second consideration is the general recognition that, even in the New Testament, there is a strong correlation between the Christological titles of Jesus and their soteriological substructure. “A separation between Christology and soteriology is not possible, because in general the soteriological interest, the interest in salvation, in the *beneficia Christi*, is what causes us to ask about the figure of Jesus” (Wolfhart Pannenberg).

Despite this consensus, there is continuing disagreement over the emphasis to be given to soteriological considerations in Christology. For example, the approach adopted by Rudolf Bultmann appears to reduce Christology to *das Dass* – the mere fact “that” a historical figure existed, to whom the kerygma can be traced and attached. The primary function of the kerygma is to transmit the soteriological content of the Christ-event. A related approach, found in A. E. Biedermann and Paul Tillich, draws a distinction between the “Christ principle” and the historical person of Jesus. This has led some writers, most notably Pannenberg, to express anxiety that a Christology might simply be constructed out of soteriological considerations (and thus be vulnerable to the criticisms of Ludwig Feuerbach), rather than grounded in the history of Jesus himself.

Interpretations of the work of Christ

Modern discussions of the meaning of the Cross and resurrection of Christ are best grouped around four central controlling themes or images. It must be stressed that these are not mutually exclusive, and that it is normal to find writers adopting approaches that incorporate elements drawn from more than one such category. Indeed, it can be argued that the views of most writers on this subject cannot be reduced to or confined within a single category without doing serious violence to their ideas.

Sacrifice The New Testament, drawing on Old Testament imagery and expectations, presents Christ’s death upon the cross as a sacrifice. This approach, which is especially associated with the Letter to the Hebrews, presents Christ’s sacrificial offering as an effective and perfect sacrifice, which was able to accomplish that which the sacrifices of the Old Testament were only able to intimate, rather than achieve. This idea is developed subsequently within the Christian tradition. For example, in

taking over the imagery of sacrifice, Augustine states that Christ “was made a sacrifice for sin, offering himself as a whole burnt offering on the cross of his passion.” In order for humanity to be restored to God, the mediator must sacrifice himself; without this sacrifice, such restoration is an impossibility. For Augustine, this sacrifice is commemorated in the eucharist. Similar ideas may be discerned in the theology of the Middle Ages, and into the early modern period.

The sacrificial offering of Christ on the cross came to be linked especially with one aspect of the “threefold office of Christ” (*munus triplex Christi*). According to this typology, which dates from the middle of the sixteenth century, the work of Christ could be summarized under three “offices”: prophet (by which Christ declares the will of God), priest (by which he makes sacrifice for sin), and king (by which he rules with authority over his people). The general acceptance of this taxonomy within Protestantism in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries led to a sacrificial understanding of Christ’s death becoming of central importance within Protestant soteriologies. Thus John Pearson’s *Exposition of the Creed* of 1659 insists upon the necessity of the sacrifice of Christ in redemption, and specifically links this with the priestly office of Christ:

The redemption or salvation which the Messiah was to bring consisteth in the freeing of a sinner from the state of sin and eternal death into a state of righteousness and eternal life. Now a freedom from sin could not be wrought without a sacrifice propitiatory, and therefore there was a necessity of a priest.

Since the Enlightenment, however, there has been a subtle shift in the meaning of the term. A metaphorical extension of meaning has come to be given priority over the original. Whereas the term originally referred to the ritual offering of slaughtered animals as a specifically religious action, the term increasingly came to mean heroic or costly action on the parts of individuals, especially the giving up of one’s life, with no transcendent reference or expectation.

This trend may be seen developing in John Locke’s *The Reasonableness of Christianity* of 1695. Locke argues that the only article of faith required of Christians is that of belief in Christ’s Messiahship; the idea of a sacrifice for sin is studiously set to one side. “The faith required was to believe Jesus to be the Messiah, the anointed, who had been promised by God to the

world. ... I do not remember that [Christ] anywhere assumes to himself the title of a priest, or mentions anything relating to his priesthood.”

These arguments were developed further by the Deist writer Thomas Chubb (1679–1747), especially in his *The True Gospel of Jesus Christ Vindicated* of 1739. Arguing that the true religion of reason was that of conformity to the eternal rule of right, Chubb argues that the idea of Christ’s death as a sacrifice arises from the apologetic concerns of the early Christian writers, which led them to harmonize this religion of reason with the cult of the Jews: “As the Jews had their temple, their altar, their high priest, their sacrifices and the like, so the apostles, in order to make Christianity bear a resemblance to Judaism, found out something or other in Christianity, which they by a figure of speech called by those names.” Chubb, in common with the emerging Enlightenment tradition, dismissed this as spurious. “God’s disposition to show mercy ... arises wholly from his own innate goodness or mercifulness, and not from anything external to him, whether it be the sufferings and death of Jesus Christ or otherwise.”

Even Joseph Butler, in attempting to reinstate the notion of sacrifice in *The Analogy of Religion* of 1736, found himself in difficulty, given the strongly rationalist spirit of the age. In upholding the sacrificial nature of Christ’s death, he found himself obliged to concede more than he cared to:

How and in what particular way [the death of Christ] had this efficacy, there are not wanting persons who have endeavoured to explain; but I do not find that Scripture has explained it. We seem to be very much in the dark concerning the manner in which the ancients understood atonements to be made, i.e., pardon to be obtained by sacrifice.

Horace Bushnell’s *Vicarious Sacrifice* of 1866 illustrates this same trend in the Anglo-American theology of the period, but in a more constructive manner. Through his suffering, Christ awakens our sense of guilt. His vicarious sacrifice demonstrates that God suffers on account of evil. In speaking of the “tender appeals of sacrifice,” Bushnell might seem to align himself with purely exemplarist understandings of the death of Christ; however, Bushnell is adamant that there are objective elements to atonement. Christ’s death affects God, and expresses God. There are strong anticipations of later theologies of the suffering of God, when Bushnell declares:

Whatever we may say or hold or believe concerning the vicarious sacrifice of Christ, we are to affirm in the same manner of God. The whole Deity is in it, in it from eternity. ... There is a cross in God before the wood is seen on the hill. ... It is as if there were a cross unseen, standing on its undiscovered hill, far back in the ages.

The use of sacrificial imagery has become noticeably less widespread since 1945, especially in German-language theology. It is highly likely that this relates directly to the rhetorical debasement of the term in secular contexts, especially in situations of national emergency. The secular use of the imagery of sacrifice, often degenerating to little more than slogan-mongering, is widely regarded as having tainted and compromised both the word and the concept. The frequent use of such phrases as “he sacrificed his life for King and country” in British circles during World War I, and Adolf Hitler’s extensive use of sacrificial imagery in justifying economic hardship and the loss of civil liberties as the price of German national revival in the late 1930s, served to render the term virtually unusable for many in Christian teaching and preaching, on account of its negative associations. Nevertheless, the idea continues to be of importance in modern Roman Catholic sacramental theology, which continues to regard the eucharist as a sacrifice, and to find in this image a rich source of theological imagery.

Christus Victor The New Testament and early church laid considerable emphasis upon the victory gained by Christ over sin, death, and Satan through his Cross and Resurrection. This theme of victory, often linked liturgically with the Easter celebrations, was of major importance within the western Christian theological tradition until the Enlightenment. With the advent of the Enlightenment, however, it began to fall out of theological favor, increasingly being regarded as outmoded and unsophisticated. The following factors appear to have contributed to this development:

1. Rational criticism of belief in the resurrection of Christ, characteristic of the Enlightenment, raised doubts concerning whether one could even begin to speak of a “victory” over death.
2. The imagery traditionally linked with this approach to the Cross – such as the existence of a personal devil in the form of Satan, and the domination of human existence by oppressive or satanic forces of sin and evil – was dismissed as premodern superstition.

The rehabilitation of this approach in the modern period is usually dated to 1931, with the appearance of Gustaf Aulén’s *Christus Victor*. This short

book, which originally appeared in German as an article in *Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie* (1930), has exercised a major influence over English-language approaches to the subject. Aulén argued that the classic Christian conception of the work of Christ was summed up in the belief that the risen Christ had brought new possibilities of life to humanity through his victory over the powers of evil. In a brief and very compressed account of the history of theories of the atonement, Aulén argued that this highly dramatic “classic” theory had dominated Christianity until the Middle Ages, when more abstract legal theories began to gain ground. The situation was radically reversed through Martin Luther, who reintroduced the theme. However, the scholastic concerns of Protestant orthodoxy led to its being relegated once more to the background. Aulén argued that this approach could no longer be allowed to be the victim of historical circumstances; it demanded a full and proper hearing.

Historically, Aulén’s case was soon found to be wanting. Its claims to be treated as the “classic” theory of the atonement had been overstated. It was indeed an important component of the general patristic understanding of the nature and mode of procurance of salvation; nevertheless, if any theory could justly lay claim to the title of “the classic theory of the atonement,” it would be the notion of redemption through unity with Christ.

Nevertheless, Aulén’s views were sympathetically received. In part, this reflects growing disenchantment with the Enlightenment worldview in general; more fundamentally, perhaps, it represents a growing realization of the reality of evil in the world, fostered by the horrors of World War I. The insights of Sigmund Freud, drawing attention to the manner in which adults could be spiritually imprisoned by their subconscious, raised serious doubts about the Enlightenment view of the total rationality of human nature, and lent new credibility to the idea that humans are held in bondage to unknown and hidden forces. Aulén’s approach seemed to resonate with a growing realization of the darker side of human nature. It had become intellectually respectable to talk about “forces of evil.”

His approach also offered a *tertium quid*, a third possibility, which mediated between the two alternatives then on offer within mainstream liberal Protestantism – both of which were regarded as flawed. The classic legal theory was regarded as raising difficult theological questions, not least concerning the morality of atonement; the subjective approach, which regarded Christ’s death as doing little more than arousing human religious

sentiment, seemed to be seriously religiously inadequate. Aulén offered an approach to the meaning of the death of Christ which bypassed the difficulties of legal approaches, yet vigorously defended the objective nature of the atonement. Nevertheless, Aulén's *Christus Victor* approach did raise some serious questions. It offered no rational justification for the manner in which the forces of evil are defeated through the cross of Christ. Why the Cross? Why not in some other manner?

Since then, the image of victory has been developed in writings on the Cross. Rudolf Bultmann extended his program of demythologization to the New Testament theme of victory, interpreting it as a victory over inauthentic existence and unbelief. Paul Tillich offers a reworking of Aulén's theory, in which the victory of Christ on the cross is interpreted as a victory over existential forces which threaten to deprive us of authentic existence. Bultmann and Tillich, in adopting such existentialist approaches, thus convert a theory of the atonement which was originally radically objective into a subjective victory within the human consciousness.

In his *Past Event and Present Salvation* (1989), Oxford theologian Paul Fiddes (b.1947) emphasizes that the notion of "victory" retains a place of significance within Christian thinking about the Cross. Christ's death does more than impart some new knowledge to us, or express old ideas in new manners. It makes possible a new mode of existence:

The victory of Christ actually creates victory in us. ... The act of Christ is one of those moments in human history that "opens up new possibilities of existence." Once a new possibility has been disclosed, other people can make it their own, repeating and reliving the experience.

Legal approaches A third approach centers on the idea of the death of Christ providing the basis by which God is enabled to forgive sin. This notion is traditionally associated with the eleventh-century writer Anselm of Canterbury, who developed an argument for the necessity of the Incarnation on its basis. This model became incorporated into classical Protestant dogmatics during the period of orthodoxy, and finds its expression in many hymns of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Three main models were used to understand the manner in which the forgiveness of human sins is related to the death of Christ:

1. *Representation.* Christ is here understood to be the covenant representative of humanity. Through faith, believers come to stand within the covenant between God and humanity. All that Christ has achieved through the Cross is available on account of the covenant. Just as God entered into a covenant with his people Israel, so he has entered into a covenant with his church. Christ, by his obedience upon the cross, represents his covenant people, winning benefits for them as their representative. By coming to faith, individuals come to stand within the covenant, and thus share in all its benefits, won by Christ through his Cross and Resurrection – including the full and free forgiveness of our sins.

2. *Participation.* Through faith, believers participate in the risen Christ. They are “in Christ,” to use Paul’s famous phrase. They are caught up in him, and share in his risen life. As a result of this, they share in all the benefits won by Christ, through his obedience upon the cross. One of those benefits is the forgiveness of sins, in which they share through their faith. Participating in Christ thus entails the forgiveness of sins, and sharing in his righteousness.

3. *Substitution.* Christ is here understood to be a substitute, the one who goes to the cross in our place. Sinners ought to have been crucified, on account of their sins. Christ was crucified in their place. God allows Christ to stand in our place, taking our guilt upon himself, so that his righteousness – won by obedience upon the cross – might become ours.

With the onset of the Enlightenment, this approach to the atonement was subjected to a radical critique. The following major points of criticism were directed against it:

1. It appeared to rest upon a notion of original guilt, which Enlightenment writers found unacceptable. Each human being was responsible for his or her own moral guilt; the very notion of an inherited guilt, as it was expressed in the traditional doctrine of original sin, was to be rejected.

2. The Enlightenment insisted upon the rationality, and perhaps above all the morality, of every aspect of Christian doctrine. This theory of the atonement appeared to be morally suspect, especially in its notions of transferred guilt or merit. The central idea of “vicarious satisfaction”

was also regarded with acute suspicion: in what sense was it moral for one human being to bear the penalties due for another?

These criticisms were given added weight through the development of the discipline of the “history of dogma” (*Dogmengeschichte*). The representatives of this movement, from G. S. Steinbart through to Adolf von Harnack, argued that a series of assumptions, each of central importance to the Anselmian doctrine of penal substitution, had become incorporated into Christian theology by what were little more than historical accidents. For example, in his *System of Pure Philosophy* of 1778, Steinbart argued that historical investigation disclosed the intrusion of three “arbitrary assumptions” into Christian reflection on salvation:

- the Augustinian doctrine of original sin;
- the concept of satisfaction;
- the doctrine of the imputation of the righteousness of Christ.

For such reasons, Steinbart felt able to declare the substructure of orthodox Protestant thinking on the atonement to be a relic of a bygone era.

More recently, the idea of guilt – a central aspect of legal approaches to soteriology – has been the subject of much discussion, especially in the light of Freud’s views on the origin of guilt in childhood experiences. For some twentieth-century writers, “guilt” is simply a psychosocial projection, whose origins lie not in the holiness of God but in the weaknesses and anxieties of human nature. These psychosocial structures are then, it is argued, projected onto some imaginary screen of “external” reality, and treated as if they are objectively true. While this represents a considerable overstatement of the case, it has the advantage of clarity, and allows us to gain an appreciation of the considerable pressure that this approach to the atonement is currently facing.

Nevertheless, this view continues to find significant representatives. The collapse of the evolutionary moral optimism of liberal Protestantism in the wake of World War I did much to raise again the question of human guilt, and the need for redemption from outside the human situation. Two significant contributions to this discussion may be regarded as precipitated directly by the credibility crisis faced by liberal Protestantism at this time.

P. T. Forsyth’s *The Justification of God* (1916), written during World War I, represents an impassioned plea to allow the notion of the “justice of God” to be rediscovered. Forsyth is less concerned than Anselm about the legal

and juridical aspects of the Cross; his interest centers on the manner in which the Cross is inextricably linked with “the whole moral fabric and movement of the universe.” The doctrine of the atonement is inseparable from “the rightness of things.” God acts to restore this “rightness of things,” in that God makes available through the Cross a means of moral regeneration – something which World War I demonstrated that humanity needed, yet was unable to provide itself:

The cross is not a theological theme, nor a forensic device, but the crisis of the moral universe on a scale far greater than earthly war. It is the theodicy of the whole God dealing with the whole soul of the whole world in holy love, righteous judgement and redeeming grace.

Through the Cross, God aims to restore the rightness of the world through rightful means – a central theme of Anselm’s doctrine of atonement, creatively restated.

More significant is the extended discussion of the theme of “atonement” or “reconciliation” (the German term *Versöhnung* can bear both meanings) to be found in Karl Barth’s *Church Dogmatics*. The central section (IV/1, §59, 2) addressing the issue is entitled – significantly – “The Judge Judged in Our Place.” The title derives from the Heidelberg Catechism, which speaks of Christ as the judge who “has represented me before the judgment of God, and has taken away all condemnation from me.” The section in question can be regarded as an extended commentary on this classic text of the Reformed tradition, dealing with the manner in which the judgment of God is in the first place made known and enacted; and in the second, is taken upon God himself (a central Anselmian theme, even if Anselm failed to integrate it within a Trinitarian context).

The entire section is steeped in the language and imagery of guilt, judgment, and forgiveness. In the Cross, we can see God exercising his rightful judgment of sinful humanity (Barth uses the compound term *Sündermensch* to emphasize that “sin” is not a detachable aspect or feature of human nature). The Cross exposes human delusions of self-sufficiency and autonomy of judgment, which Barth sees encapsulated in the story of Genesis 3: “the human being wants to be his own judge.”

Yet alteration of the situation demands that its inherent wrongness be acknowledged. For Barth, the Cross of Christ represents the locus in which

the righteous judge makes known his judgment of sinful humanity, and simultaneously takes that judgment upon himself:

What took place is that the Son of God fulfilled the righteous judgement on us human beings by himself taking our place as a human being, and in our place undergoing the judgement under which we had passed. ... Because God willed to execute his judgement on us in his Son, it all took place in his person, as his accusation and condemnation and destruction. He judged, and it was the judge who was judged, who allowed himself to be judged.

The strongly substitutionary character of this approach will be evident. God exercises his righteous judgment by exposing our sin, by taking it upon himself, and thus by neutralizing its power. The Cross thus both speaks “for us” and “against us.” Unless the Cross is allowed to reveal the full extent of our sin, it cannot take that sin from us:

The “for us” of his death on the cross included and encloses this terrible “against us.” Without this terrible “against us,” it would not be the divine and holy and redemptive and effectively helpful “for us,” in which the conversion of humanity and the world to God has become an event.

Exemplarist approaches A central aspect of the New Testament understanding of the meaning of the Cross relates to the demonstration of the love of God for humanity. With the rise of the Enlightenment worldview, increasingly critical approaches were adopted to theories of the atonement which incorporated transcendent elements – such as the idea of a sacrifice which had some impact upon God, or Christ dying in order to pay some penalty or satisfaction which was due for sin. The increasingly skeptical attitude to the Resurrection tended to discourage theologians from incorporating this into their theologies of atonement with anything even approaching the enthusiasm of earlier generations. As a result, the emphasis of theologians sympathetic to the Enlightenment came to focus upon the Cross itself.

However, many Enlightenment theologians also had difficulties with the “two natures” doctrine. The form of Christology which perhaps expresses the spirit of the Enlightenment most faithfully is a degree Christology – that is to say, a Christology which recognizes a difference of degree, but not of nature, between Christ and other human beings. Jesus Christ was

recognized as embodying certain qualities that were present, actually or potentially, in all other human beings, the difference lying in the superior extent to which he embodied them.

When such considerations are applied to theories of atonement, a consistent pattern begins to emerge. This can be studied from the writings of leading representatives of the German Enlightenment, such as G. S. Steinbart, I. G. Töllner, G. F. Seiler, and K. G. Bretschneider. Its basic features can be summarized as follows:

1. The Cross has no transcendent reference or value; its value relates directly to its impact upon humanity. Thus the Cross represents a “sacrifice” only in that it represents Christ giving up his life.
2. The person who died upon the Cross was a human being, and the impact of that death is upon human beings. That impact takes the form of inspiration and encouragement to model ourselves upon the moral example set us in Jesus himself.
3. The most important aspect of the Cross is that it demonstrates the love of God toward us.

This approach became highly influential in rationalist circles throughout nineteenth-century Europe. The mystery and apparent irrationalism of the Cross had been neutralized; what remained was a powerful and dramatic plea for the moral improvement of humanity, modeled on the lifestyle and attitudes of Jesus Christ. The model of a martyr, rather than a savior, describes the attitude increasingly adopted toward Jesus within such circles.

The most significant challenge to this eighteenth-century rationalist approach to the Cross is due to F. D. E. Schleiermacher, who insisted upon the religious value of the death of Christ. Christ did not die to make or endorse a moral system; he came in order that the supremacy of the consciousness of God could be established in humanity. Nevertheless, Schleiermacher was often represented as teaching a view of the atonement as *Lebenserhöhung*, a kind of moral elevation of life (as in the account set forth by Gustaf Aulén). His distinctive ideas proved to be capable of being assimilated to purely exemplarist understandings, rather than posing a coherent challenge to them.

The most significant statement of an exemplarist approach to atonement in England is to be found in the 1915 Bampton Lectures of the noted modernist Hastings Rashdall. In these lectures, Rashdall launched a

vigorous attack on traditional approaches to the atonement. The only interpretation of the Cross that is adequate for the needs of the modern age is that already associated with the medieval writer Peter Abelard:

The church's early creed, "There is none other name given among men by which we may be saved," may be translated so as to be something of this kind: "There is none other ideal given among men by which we may be saved, except the moral ideal which Christ taught us by his words, and illustrated by his life and death of love."

Other English writers who adopted similar or related approaches include G. W. H. Lampe and John Hick. In his essay "The Atonement: Law and Love," contributed to the volume *Soundings*, Lampe launched a fierce attack on legal approaches to his subject, before commending an exemplarist approach based on "the paradox and miracle of love."

The position of John Hick is of especial interest, in that it relates to the place of the work of Christ in inter-faith dialogue. The religious pluralist agenda has certain important theological consequences. Traditional Christian theology does not lend itself particularly well to the homogenizing agenda of religious pluralists. The suggestion that all religions are more or less talking about vaguely the same thing finds itself in difficulty in relation to certain essentially Christian ideas – most notably, the doctrines of the Incarnation, atonement, and the Trinity. The suggestion that something unique is made possible or available through the death of Christ is held to belittle non-Christian religions. In response to this pressure, a number of major Christological and theological developments may be noted. Doctrines such as the Incarnation, which imply a high profile of identification between Jesus Christ and God, are discarded, in favor of various degree Christologies, which are more amenable to the reductionist program of liberalism.

A sharp distinction is thus drawn between the historical person of Jesus Christ, and the principles which he is alleged to represent. Paul Knitter is but one of a small galaxy of pluralist writers concerned to drive a wedge between the "Jesus-event" (which is unique to Christianity) and the "Christ-principle" (accessible to all religious traditions, and expressed in their own distinctive, but equally valid, ways). Viewed in this pluralist light, the Cross of Christ is thus understood to make known something which is accessible in other manners, and which is a universal religious possibility. Thus Hick argues that the Christ-event is only "one of the points at which God has

been and still is creatively at work within human life”; his distinctiveness relates solely to his being a “visible story,” and not an “additional truth.”

The Cross: constitutive or illustrative?

In his *Doctrine of Reconciliation* of 1898, Martin Kähler posed the following question concerning theories of the atonement: “Did Christ just make known some insights concerning an unchangeable situation – or did he establish a new situation?” With this question we come to a central aspect of soteriology. Does the Cross of Christ illustrate the saving will of God? Or does it make such a salvation possible in the first place? Is it constitutive or illustrative?

The latter approach has been characteristic of much writing inspired by the Enlightenment, which treats the Cross as a historical symbol of a timeless truth. The Scottish theologian John Macquarrie (1919–2007) firmly defended this approach in his *Principles of Christian Theology* of 1977:

It is not that, at a given moment, God adds the activity of reconciliation to his previous activities, or that we can set a time when his reconciling activity began. Rather, it is the case that at a given time there was a new and decisive interpretation of an activity that had always been going on, an activity that is equiprimordial with creation itself.

A similar approach is associated with Maurice F. Wiles (1929–2005), who argued in *The Remaking of Christian Doctrine* of 1974 that the Christ-event is “in some way a demonstration of what is true of God’s eternal nature.” Brian Hebblethwaite concurs: “it needs to be stated quite categorically that God’s forgiving love does not depend on the death of Christ, but rather is manifested and enacted in it.”

Yet the debate is far from over. In *The Actuality of Atonement* (1988), Colin Gunton (1941–2003) suggests that non-constitutive approaches to the atonement run the risk of falling back into exemplarist and subjective doctrines of salvation. Yet it is necessary to say that Christ does not just reveal something of importance to us; he achieves something for us – something without which salvation would not be possible. Raising the question of whether “the real evil of the world is faced and healed ontologically in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus,” Gunton argues that there must be a sense in which Christ is a “substitute” for us: he does

for us something that we ourselves cannot do. To deny this is to revert to some form of Pelagianism, or a purely subjective understanding of salvation.

The nature of salvation

What is the salvation that is made known or possible through the death of Christ? “Salvation” is an enormously complex notion, embracing a number of related and mutually interacting ideas. The following major themes may all be discerned in modern discussions of the subject, and are noted simply to indicate the complexity of the subject, as well as to allow the reader to gain an appreciation of some of the characteristic emphases within modern theology.

It must be stressed that a major theological point underlies the various manners in which salvation is interpreted. The growth of Christianity in recent centuries, chiefly through missionary work, has raised the issue of contextualization. How should the vocabulary and conceptual framework of the Christian tradition be adapted or refined to meet the new situations into which the Christian faith has expanded? Harvey M. Conn is one writer to raise the importance of this question, noting that salvation is to be particularized in terms of the situation addressed by the gospel at any given moment. Historically, this has meant that notions of salvation have varied from one cultural context to another – a point that lends added weight to Wolfhart Pannenberg’s plea that Christologies should not be constructed solely on soteriological foundations, but should engage with and be grounded in the history of Jesus of Nazareth. A brief survey will indicate the considerable diversity of concepts of salvation which have gained influence since 1700:

- *Deification*. The motif of deification dominates the soteriology of the early church, as can be seen from the writings of (to note but a few examples) Athanasius and the Cappadocian Fathers. It has remained an integral part of eastern Orthodox theology in the modern period, and plays a significant role in the theology of modern writers within this tradition such as Vladimir Lossky.
- *Righteousness before God*. The notion of righteousness before God (*coram Deo*) played a major part in the development of Luther’s doctrine of justification in the sixteenth century. Lutheran orthodoxy,

especially during the eighteenth century, retained this emphasis on justification. Both Pietist and Enlightenment writers regarded the notion of “imputed righteousness” with some suspicion, considering it to amount to a legal fiction or moral deception. This led to an increased emphasis upon holiness within the Pietist tradition, and upon morality within Enlightenment circles, and an increasing reluctance on the part of mainstream Protestant theologians to make use of the imagery of justification. In part, this is due to the increased use of the imagery of union with Christ within Calvinist theological circles.

- *Union with Christ.* The notion of a personal union between the believer and Christ was a significant element of patristic soteriologies. The notion of a union with Christ was developed by both Luther and Calvin at the time of the Reformation; only in the writings of the latter, however, did it assume a major soteriological role. In later Calvinism, the idea comes to be of central importance. Eighteenth-century Calvinist writers in both Europe and America regarded this emphasis upon union with Christ as bypassing the moral difficulties raised by the Lutheran concept of justification. In that believers were genuinely united to Christ, they were entitled to share in his righteousness.
- *Moral perfection.* The characteristic view of the Enlightenment was that religion, where it could be approved, was concerned with the moral improvement of humanity. In its typical form, this view argues that Jesus is to be regarded as a teacher of the moral life, which is conformity to the will of God. This will, which can be known equally well through reason as through the teaching of Christ, was distorted by New Testament writers, who sought to add various arbitrary or self-serving doctrines to the simple moral religion of Jesus.

In its more developed form, this approach subsequently drew upon the ideas of Immanuel Kant, especially in his *Religion within the Limits of Reason Alone*. Kant discussed the role of Jesus in relation to the “ideal of moral perfection,” and related this to the notion of the “kingdom of God,” understood as a realm of ethical values. This approach would have considerable influence within liberal Protestantism, especially the Ritschlian school, which regarded Jesus as “the founder of a universal moral community.”

- *Consciousness of God.* F. D. E. Schleiermacher, reacting against purely rational or moral conceptions of Christianity, developed the idea that

human salvation was to be discussed in terms of the domination of God-consciousness. This consciousness finds its prototypical expression in Jesus of Nazareth, and is thence made available as a possibility within the community of faith.

- *Genuine humanity.* The rise of **existentialism** in the twentieth century is widely regarded as linked with a sense of dehumanization in contemporary western culture. A number of writers have therefore argued that salvation is to be understood in terms of the rediscovery and restitution of an authentic and genuine humanity. Significant contributions here were made by Eberhard Grisebach and Friedrich Gogarten, drawing on the personalism of Martin Buber. Grisebach analyzed the dilemma faced by modern humanity in terms of a quest for authentic human identity. Gogarten argued that soteriology concerns the question of how a human can become a person – a genuine “Thou” in a world which threatens to depersonalize human existence and reduce it to the level of an “It.”
- *Political liberation.* Latin American liberation theology has emphasized the political aspects of the notion of salvation, and may be regarded as a recovery of the social, political, and economic aspects of biblical (especially Old Testament) approaches to the theme. This move, which may be regarded as a protest against purely individualist conceptions of salvation (such as those noted immediately above), has met with considerable resistance from those who regard salvation as a privatized matter, divorced from the affairs of this world. Gustavo Gutiérrez’s *Theology of Liberation* of 1971 and José Miguel Bonino’s *Towards a Christian Political Ethics* of 1983 represent typical accounts of politicized concepts of salvation, drawn from Roman Catholic and evangelical traditions respectively.

Movement that places emphasis on the subjectivity of individual existence.

This brief survey of the understandings of salvation in modern Christian thought has touched on the main issues of debate. Inevitably, most have been discussed at only a fraction of the length that they merit. It will, however, be clear that discussion of these issues – including the contextualization of salvation – will remain a perennial task of responsible Christian theology.

Case study 4.3 The debate over the Resurrection

The Resurrection has been one of the most widely debated areas of modern Christian theology. In part, this reflects the fact that the important question of the relation of faith and history often comes to focus on the question of the resurrection of Christ. The question of the resurrection of Christ – more specifically, whether Christ was indeed raised from the dead, and, if so, what that event might mean – brings together the central components of the Enlightenment critique of traditional Christianity. In what follows, we shall outline the main positions to have developed during the modern period, and attempt to assess their significance.

The Enlightenment: the Resurrection as non-event

The characteristic Enlightenment emphasis on the omniscience of reason and the importance of contemporary analogues to past events led to the development of an intensely skeptical attitude toward the Resurrection in the eighteenth century. G. E. Lessing provides an excellent example of a writer to adopt this skeptical attitude. Lessing confesses that he does not have first-hand experience of the resurrection of Jesus Christ; so why, he asks, should he be asked to believe in something he has not seen? The problem of chronological distance, according to Lessing, is made all the more acute on account of his doubts (which he evidently assumes others will share) concerning the reliability of the eyewitness reports. Our faith eventually rests upon the authority of others, rather than the authority of our own experience and rational reflection upon it, “since the truth of these miracles has completely ceased to be demonstrable by miracles happening now, since they are no more than reports of miracles.” In other words, as men and women are not raised from the dead now, why should we believe that such a thing happened in the past?

As we have seen, rationalist writers such as Reimarus and Lessing denied that human testimony to a past event (such as the Resurrection) was sufficient to make it credible if it appeared to be contradicted by present direct experience, no matter how well documented the original event may

have been. Similarly, the leading French rationalist Denis Diderot declared that if the entire population of Paris were to assure him that a dead man had just been raised from the dead, he would not believe a word of it.

This growing skepticism concerning the “miraculous evidences” of the New Testament forced traditional Christianity to defend the doctrine of the divinity of Christ on grounds other than miracles – which, at the time, it proved singularly incapable of doing. Of course, it must be noted that other religions claiming miraculous evidences were subjected to equally great skeptical criticism by the Enlightenment: Christianity happened to be singled out for particular comment on account of its religious domination of the cultural milieu in which the Enlightenment developed.

At issue here is a central theme of the Enlightenment: human autonomy. Reality is rational, and human beings have the necessary epistemological capacities to uncover this rational ordering of the world. Truth is not something which demands to be accepted on the basis of an external authority; it is to be recognized and accepted by the autonomous thinking person on the basis of the perception of congruence between what that individual knows to be true and the alleged “truth” which presents itself for verification. Truth is something that is discerned, not something that is imposed.

For Lessing, being obligated to accept the testimony of others is tantamount to the compromising of human intellectual autonomy. There are no contemporary analogues for the Resurrection. Resurrection is not an aspect of modern experience. So why trust the New Testament reports? For Lessing, the Resurrection is little more than a misunderstood non-event, of no fundamental importance to the moral significance of Jesus.

David Friedrich Strauss: the Resurrection as myth

In his *Life of Jesus* (1835), Strauss provided a radical new approach to the question of the resurrection of Christ. Strauss himself notes that the resurrection of Christ is of central importance to Christian faith:

The root of faith in Jesus was the conviction of his resurrection. He who had been put to death, however great during his life, could not, it was thought, be the Messiah: his miraculous restoration of life proved so much the more strongly that he was the Messiah. Freed by his resurrection from the kingdom of shades, and at the same time elevated

above the sphere of earthly humanity, he was now translated to the heavenly regions, and had taken his place at the right hand of God.

Strauss notes that this understanding of what he terms “the Christology of the orthodox system” has come under considerable attack since the Enlightenment, not least on account of its presupposition that miracles (such as a resurrection) are impossible.

On the basis of this a priori assumption, which corresponds neatly to the Enlightenment worldview, Strauss declares his intention to explain “the origin of faith in the resurrection of Jesus without any corresponding miraculous fact.” In other words, Strauss was concerned to explain how Christians came to believe in the Resurrection, when there was no objective historical basis for this belief. Having excluded the Resurrection as a “miraculous objective occurrence,” Strauss located the origin of the belief at the purely subjective level. Belief in the Resurrection is not to be explained as a response to “a life objectively restored,” but is “a subjective conception in the mind.” Faith in the resurrection of Jesus is the outcome of an exaggerated “recollection of the personality of Jesus himself,” by which a memory has been projected into the idea of a living presence. A dead Jesus is thus transfigured into an imaginary risen Christ – a mythical risen Christ, to use the appropriate term.

Strauss’s distinctive contribution to the debate was to introduce the category of “myth” – a reflection of the gospel writers’ social conditioning and cultural outlook. To suggest that their writings were partly “mythical” was thus not so much a challenge to their integrity, but simply an acknowledgment of the premodern outlook of the period in which they were written. The gospel writers must be regarded as sharing the mythical worldview of their cultural situation. Strauss distances himself from Reimarus’s suggestion that the evangelists distorted their accounts of Jesus of Nazareth, whether unconsciously or deliberately. He argues that mythical language is the natural mode of expression of a primitive group culture which had yet to rise to the level of abstract conceptualization.

For Reimarus, the gospel writers were either confused or they were liars – more likely the latter. Strauss moved the discussion away from this by his introduction of the category of “myth.” The Resurrection was to be viewed as a myth – not a deliberate fabrication, but an interpretation of events (especially the memory and “subjective vision” of Jesus) in terms which made sense in first-century Palestinian culture, dominated by a mythical

worldview. Belief in the Resurrection as an objective event must be regarded as becoming impossible with the passing of that worldview.

Strauss's *Life of Jesus*, along with other rationalizing works of the same period, such as Ernest Renan's work of the same name (1863), attracted enormous attention. The Resurrection, traditionally seen as the basis of Christian faith, was now viewed as its product. Christianity is seen as relating to the memory of a dead Jesus, rather than being the celebration of a risen Christ. However, the debate was far from over. In what follows, we shall consider later developments in this intriguing chapter of modern theology. Perhaps Strauss's most acute reinterpreter in the twentieth century has been Rudolf Bultmann, to whose distinctive views on the Resurrection we now turn.

Rudolf Bultmann: the Resurrection as an event in the experience of the disciples

Bultmann shared Strauss's basic conviction that, in this scientific age, it is impossible to believe in miracles. As a result, belief in an objective resurrection of Jesus is no longer possible; however, it may well prove to be possible to make sense of it in another manner. History, Bultmann argued, is "a closed continuum of effects in which individual events are connected by the succession of cause and effect." The Resurrection, in common with other miracles, would thus disrupt the closed system of nature. Similar points had been made by other thinkers sympathetic to the Enlightenment.

Bultmann famously argued that belief in an objective resurrection of Jesus, although perfectly legitimate and intelligible in the first century, cannot be taken seriously today. "It is impossible to use electric light and radio equipment and, when ill, to claim the assistance of modern medical and clinical discoveries, and at the same time believe in the New Testament world of spirits and miracles." The human understanding of the world and of human existence has changed radically since the first century, with the result that modern humanity finds the mythological worldview of the New Testament unintelligible and unacceptable. A worldview is given to someone with the age in which they live, and they are in no position to alter it. The modern scientific and existential worldview means that that of the New Testament is now discarded and unintelligible.

For this reason, the Resurrection is to be regarded as “a mythical event, pure and simple.” The Resurrection is something that happened in the subjective experience of the disciples, not something that took place in the public arena of history. For Bultmann, Jesus has indeed been raised – he has been raised up into the kerygma. The preaching of Jesus himself has been transformed into the Christian proclamation of Christ. Jesus has become an element of Christian preaching; he has been raised up and taken up into the proclamation of the gospel. Historical issues, such as the “narratives of the empty tomb,” are of “no consequence.” For Bultmann, the fundamental meaning of the Easter faith is “to believe in the Christ present in the kerygma.”

Consistent with his anti-historical approach in general, Bultmann directs attention away from the historical Jesus toward the proclamation of Christ. “Faith in the church as the bearer of the kerygma is the Easter faith which consists in the belief that Jesus Christ is present in the kerygma.”

Karl Barth: the Resurrection as an historical event beyond critical inquiry

Barth wrote a small work entitled *The Resurrection of the Dead* in 1924. However, his mature views on the relation of the Resurrection to history date from considerably later, and have clearly been influenced by Bultmann. Barth’s essay “Rudolf Bultmann – An Attempt to Understand Him” (1952) set out his misgivings concerning Bultmann’s approach. This was followed up by a sustained engagement with the issues at stake in *Church Dogmatics* IV/1 (1953). In what follows, we shall attempt to set out Barth’s position, and compare it with that of Bultmann.

In his early writings, Barth argued that the empty tomb was of minimal importance in relation to the Resurrection. However, he became increasingly alarmed at Bultmann’s existential approach to the Resurrection, which seemed to imply that it had no objective historical foundation. For this reason, Barth comes to place considerable emphasis upon the gospel accounts of the empty tomb. The empty tomb is “an indispensable sign” that “obviates all possible misunderstanding.” It demonstrates that the resurrection of Christ was not a purely inward, interior, or subjective event, but something that left a mark upon history.

Karl Barth (1886–1968). Widely regarded as the most important Protestant theologian of the twentieth century. Originally inclined to support liberal Protestantism, Barth was moved to adopt a more theocentric position through his reflections on World War I. His early emphasis on the “otherness” of God in his Romans commentary (1919) was continued and modified in his monumental *Church Dogmatics*. Barth’s contribution to modern Christian theology has been immense.

This would seem to suggest that Barth regards the Resurrection as being open to historical investigation, to clarify its nature and confirm its place in the public history of the world rather than in the private interior experience of the first believers. Yet this is not so. He consistently refuses to allow the gospel narratives to be subjected to critical historical scrutiny. It is not entirely clear why. The following factor appears to have weighed heavily in his thinking at this point.

Barth emphasizes that Paul and the other apostles are not calling for the “acceptance of a well-attested historical report,” but are calling for “a decision of faith.” Historical investigation cannot legitimize nor provide security for such faith; nor can faith become dependent upon the provisional results of historical inquiry. In any case, faith is a response to the risen Christ, not to the empty tomb. Barth was quite clear that the empty tomb, taken by itself, was of little value in laying the foundation for faith in the risen Christ. The absence of Christ from his tomb does not necessarily imply his resurrection: “he might, in fact, have been stolen, he might have only appeared to be dead.”

As a result, Barth is left in what initially seems to be a highly vulnerable position. Concerned to defend the Resurrection as an act in public history against Bultmann’s subjectivist approach, he is not prepared to allow that history to be critically studied. In part, this rests upon his passionate belief that historical scholarship cannot lay the basis for faith; in part, it reflects his assumption that the resurrection of Christ is part of a much larger network of ideas and events, which cannot be disclosed or verified by historical inquiry. However much one may sympathize with Barth’s theological concerns, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that he lacks credibility at this point. It is perhaps for this reason that the approach of Wolfhart Pannenberg has been the subject of considerable attention.

Wolfhart Pannenberg: the Resurrection as an historical event open to critical inquiry

The most distinctive feature of Pannenberg's theological program, as it emerged during the 1960s, is the appeal to universal history. Such views are developed and justified in the 1961 volume *Revelation as History*, edited by Pannenberg, in which these ideas are explored at some length. Pannenberg's "Dogmatic Theses on the Doctrine of Revelation" opens with a powerful appeal to universal history:

History is the most comprehensive horizon of Christian theology. All theological questions and answers have meaning only within the framework of the history which God has with humanity, and through humanity with the whole creation, directed towards a future which is hidden to the world, but which has already been revealed in Jesus Christ.

These crucially important opening sentences sum up the distinctive features of Pannenberg's theological program at this stage in his career. They immediately distinguish him from the ahistorical theology of Bultmann and his school on the one hand, and the suprahistorical approach of Martin Kähler on the other. Christian theology is based upon an analysis of universal and publicly accessible history. For Pannenberg, revelation was essentially a public and universal historical event which was recognized and interpreted as an "act of God." To his critics, this seemed to reduce faith to insight and deny any role to the Holy Spirit in the event of revelation.

Wolfgang Pannenberg (b.1928). One of the most influential German Protestant theologians, whose writings on the relation of faith and history, and particularly the foundations of Christology, have had considerable influence.

Pannenberg's argument takes the following form. History, in all its totality, can only be understood when it is viewed from its endpoint. This point alone provides the perspective from which the historical process can be seen in its totality, and thus properly understood. However, where Marx argued that the social sciences (by predicting the goal of history to be the hegemony of socialism) provided the key to the interpretation of history, Pannenberg declared that this was provided only in Jesus Christ. The end of history is disclosed proleptically in the history of Jesus Christ. In other words, the end of history, which has yet to take place, has been disclosed in advance of the event in the person and work of Christ.

This idea of a "proleptic disclosure of the end of history" is grounded in the apocalyptic worldview, which Pannenberg argues provides the key to

understanding the New Testament interpretation of the significance and function of Jesus. Whereas Bultmann chose to demythologize the apocalyptic elements of the New Testament, Pannenberg treats them as a hermeneutical grid or framework by which the life, death, and resurrection of Christ may be interpreted.

Perhaps the most distinctive, and certainly the most commented upon, aspect of this work is Pannenberg's insistence that the resurrection of Jesus is an objective historical event, witnessed by all who had access to the evidence. Whereas Bultmann treated the Resurrection as an event within the experiential world of the disciples, Pannenberg declares that it belongs to the world of universal public history.

Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923). A theologian and sociologist who was closely involved in the founding of the "History of Religions School," which placed an emphasis upon the historical continuity of the religions. His most important theological contributions are thought to lie in the field of Christology, especially his discussion of the relation between faith and history.

This immediately raised the question of the historicity of the Resurrection. As noted earlier, a group of Enlightenment writers had argued that our only knowledge of the alleged resurrection of Jesus was contained in the New Testament. In that there were no contemporary analogues for such a resurrection, the credibility of those reports had to be seriously questioned. In a similar vein, Ernst Troeltsch had argued for the homogeneity of history; in that the resurrection of Jesus appeared to radically disrupt that homogeneity, it was to be regarded as of dubious historicity. Pannenberg initially responded to these difficulties in an essay on "redemptive event and history," and subsequently in *Jesus – God and Man*. His basic argument against this position can be set out as follows.

Troeltsch, in Pannenberg's view, has a pedantically narrow view of history, which rules out certain events in advance on the basis of a set of provisional judgments that have improperly come to have the status of absolute laws. Troeltsch's unwarranted "constriction of historico-critical inquiry" was "biased" and "anthropocentric." It presupposed that the human viewpoint is the only acceptable and normative standpoint within history. Analogies, Pannenberg stresses, are always analogies viewed from the standpoint of the human observer; that standpoint is radically restricted in its scope, and cannot be allowed to function as the absolutely certain basis of critical inquiry. Pannenberg is too good a historian to suggest that the principle of analogy should be abandoned; it is, after all, a proven and

useful tool of historical research. Yet, Pannenberg insists, that is all that it is: it is a working tool, and cannot be allowed to define a fixed view of reality.

If the historian sets out to investigate the New Testament already pre-committed to the belief that “dead people do not rise again,” that conclusion will merely be read back into the New Testament material. The judgment “Jesus did not rise from the dead” will be the presupposition, not the conclusion, of such an investigation. Pannenberg’s discussion of this question represents an impassioned and impressive plea for a neutral approach to the Resurrection. The historical evidence pointing to the resurrection of Jesus must be investigated without the prior dogmatic presupposition that such a resurrection could not have happened.

Having argued for the historicity of the Resurrection, Pannenberg turns to deal with its interpretation within the context of the apocalyptic framework of meaning. The end of history has proleptically taken place in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This maxim dominates Pannenberg’s interpretation of the event. The resurrection of Jesus anticipates the general resurrection at the end of time, and brings forward into history both that resurrection and the full and final revelation of God. The resurrection of Jesus is thus organically linked with the self-revelation of God in Christ, and establishes Jesus’ identity with God, and allows this identity with God to be read back into his pre-Easter ministry. It thus functions as the foundation of a series of central Christological affirmations, including the divinity of Christ (however this is expressed) and the Incarnation.

It will be clear that the doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth has been the subject of considerable discussion within the last two centuries. A matter which has been the subject of renewed interest in the twentieth century has been the doctrine of the Trinity, to which we now turn.

Case study 4.4 The Trinity in twentieth-century thought

It is widely agreed that the doctrine of the Trinity was marginalized in nineteenth-century thought. The reasons for this are complex. One factor that is certainly significant is the influence of rationalism, which tended to regard the doctrine of the Trinity as absurd. This view can certainly be found in the writings of Thomas Jefferson, third president of the United States, who regarded the Trinity as an irrational obstacle to proper Christian devotion. In a letter to Timothy Pickering, dated February 27, 1821, Jefferson complained of the apparent irrationality of the notion:

When we shall have done away with the incomprehensible jargon of the Trinitarian arithmetic, that there are one, and one is three; when we shall have knocked down the artificial scaffolding, reared to mask from view the very simple structure of Jesus; when, in short, we shall have unlearned everything which has been taught since his day, and got back to the pure and simple doctrines he inculcated, we shall then be truly and worthily his disciples; and my opinion is that if nothing had ever been added to what flowed purely from His lips, the whole world would at this day have been Christian.

The German liberal theologian F. D. E. Schleiermacher placed his discussion of the doctrine of the Trinity right at the end of his *The Christian Faith*, thus suggesting that he regarded the doctrine as some kind of appendix to Christian theology. In fact, however, Schleiermacher argued that the doctrine of the Trinity brought together a number of critical insights concerning the identity of Jesus and the nature of the Christian faith, without which it would lose its identity. The doctrine acted as a “coping-stone,” a final stone added to a complex structure which ensures that all its component parts are secured in their proper places:

[The doctrine of the Trinity] only established itself in defense of the position that in Christ there was present nothing less than the Divine Essence, which also indwells the Christian Church as its common Spirit, and that we take these expressions in no reduced or sheerly artificial sense, and know nothing of any special higher essences,

subordinate deities (as it were) present in Christ and the Holy Spirit. The doctrine of the Trinity has no origin but this; and at first it had no other aim than to equate as definitely as possible the Divine Essence considered as thus united to human nature with the Divine Essence in itself. ... In virtue of this connexion, we rightly regard the doctrine of the Trinity, in so far as it is a deposit of these elements, as the coping-stone of Christian doctrine, and thus equating with each other of the divine in each of these two unions, as also of both with the Divine Essence in itself, as what is essential in the doctrine of the Trinity.

However, there has been a remarkable revival of interest in the doctrine of the Trinity in twentieth-century Christian theology. It is generally thought that this Trinitarian renaissance is primarily due to the foundational work of Karl Barth, who we shall consider presently. Yet there are signs of a growing realization of the necessity of a Trinitarian understanding of God in the late nineteenth century. One reason for this is an awareness of the theological and spiritual inadequacy of the alternatives.

An excellent example of this form of reflection can be found in the works of Henry Barclay Swete (1835–1917), one of England's foremost theologians and biblical scholars, who ended his career as Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University. In an address given to the Exeter Church Congress in Exeter Cathedral in 1894, Swete explored the theological options available to the church on the doctrine of the Trinity, and offered a vigorous defense of its traditional teaching. Swete focused on the question of the identity and nature of the Holy Spirit (note that Swete uses the older phrase "Holy Ghost"), and illustrates why the traditional doctrine of the Trinity, for all its difficulties, offers the best resolution of the complex theological issues.

GOD is a Spirit. Yet there is a Spirit of God, as all Scripture testifies, the Old Testament equally with the New. At first sight the two statements appear to be irreconcilable. The human spirit is a constituent of a complex nature, and stands in sharp contrast with the body and the lower life. But the Divine Nature is at once simple and purely spiritual. How shall we conceive of a Divine Spirit, differentiated in any sense from God Himself?

Three answers have been given to this question.

(1) Arianism attempted to solve the problem by denying the proper Godhead of the Spirit. The Spirit of God, it urged, is not called God in Scripture; He belongs to God, but not as possessing the Divine Essence. The Holy Spirit is the first of all the intelligences which were called into existence by the Word. Far above Angels and Archangels, admitted into the glorious Triad which begins with the Almighty Father, He is nevertheless infinitely removed from the majesty of the Uncreated Life. ... [This] makes the Christian life impossible; for how can a created Spirit quicken, sanctify, divinize humanity? It breaks down the analogy which S. Paul recognizes between the Spirit of God and the spirit of man. The spirit of man is human, and belongs to the being of a man. Unless the Spirit of God belongs to the Divine Essence, it does not stand in a corresponding relation to the Nature of God.

(2) The second answer, which is that of the Unitarian Theist, escapes from these difficulties. The Spirit of God, it acknowledges, is necessarily Divine. The Holy Spirit is, in fact, God Himself, but God regarded in the light of His workings upon Nature and man; the Presence of the Infinite Life pervading all that lives and is. It was this gracious operative Presence which *brooded upon the face of waters*, when the earth was yet waste and void; which reluctantly withdrew itself from the life of men as they fell under the yoke of the flesh; which is revealed as the source of wisdom in the wise, of skill in the mechanic and the artist, of prophecy in the seer, of holiness in saint. ...

(3) There is a third answer which does not exclude the second, but is complementary to it. The Catholic faith teaches all that the Old Testament teaches – that the Spirit of God is God Himself, that He is the mysterious Presence which is immanent in the world as the principle of life and which in rational creatures supplies the supernatural gift of sanctifying grace. But it goes beyond this teaching as Christ went beyond it, and to some extent corrects the conclusions to which it has led. The Holy Ghost, it declares, is God proceeding from God. He is God in a certain eternal relation to the Father and the Son. He is not the Father or the Son, but the Spirit of Both. We identify Him with God, we distinguish Him as a Person from the other Persons in God. Thus the Catholic doctrine is not satisfied with the discrimination of God the Spirit as God present and operating in the creature; it pushes the enquiry further back, and finds a distinction within the Life of the Creator. The

Spirit is God, but God is tri-personal, and the Spirit is the Third Person in the Unity of the Divine Essence.

It is widely agreed that, although the foundations for the Trinitarian revival in theology were laid in the decades before World War I (1914–18), the renewal of the doctrine dates from the 1920s and beyond. In what follows, we shall explore three major contributions to the modern discussion of the Trinity, reflecting a Reformed (Karl Barth), Roman Catholic (Karl Rahner), and Lutheran (Robert Jenson) perspective.

Karl Barth

Barth sets the doctrine of the Trinity at the opening of his *Church Dogmatics*. This simple observation is important, for he totally inverts the position in which it was placed by his rival, Schleiermacher. For Schleiermacher, as we have seen, the Trinity is perhaps the last word which can be said about God; for Barth, it is the word which must be spoken before revelation is even a possibility. It is thus placed at the opening of the *Church Dogmatics*, because its subject matter makes that dogmatics possible in the first place. The doctrine of the Trinity undergirds and guarantees the actuality of divine revelation to sinful humanity. It is an “explanatory confirmation,” as Barth puts it, of revelation. It is an exegesis of the fact of revelation.

“God reveals himself. He reveals himself through himself. He reveals himself.” With these words (which it is virtually impossible to translate into inclusive language), Barth sets up the revelational framework which leads to the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity. *Deus dixit!* God has spoken in revelation – and it is the task of theology to inquire into what this revelation presupposes and implies. For Barth, theology is *Nach-Denken*, a process of “thinking afterwards” about what is contained in God’s self-revelation. We have to “inquire carefully into the relation between our knowing of God, and God himself in his being and nature.” With such statements, Barth sets up the context of the doctrine of the Trinity: given that God’s self-revelation has taken place, what must be true of God if this can have happened? What does the actuality of revelation have to tell us about the being of God? Barth’s starting point for his discussion of the Trinity is not a doctrine or an idea, but the actuality of God’s speaking and

God's being heard. For how can God be heard, when sinful humanity is incapable of hearing him?

The above paragraph is simply a paraphrase of sections of the first half-volume of Barth's *Church Dogmatics*, entitled "The Doctrine of the Word of God," punctuated by occasional quotations. There is an enormous amount being said in this, and it requires unpacking. Two themes need to be carefully noted:

1. Sinful humanity is fundamentally incapable of hearing the Word of God.
2. Nevertheless, sinful humanity has heard the Word of God, in that this word makes its sinfulness known to it.

The very fact that revelation takes place thus requires explanation. For Barth, this implies that humanity is passive in the process of reception; the process of revelation is, from its beginning to its end, subject to the sovereignty of God as Lord. For revelation to be revelation, God must be capable of revelation (which Barth clearly understands as "self-disclosure") to sinful humanity, despite its sinfulness.

Once this paradox has been appreciated, the general structure of Barth's doctrine of the Trinity can be followed. In revelation, Barth argues, God must be in himself what he shows himself to be. There must be a direct correspondence between the Revealer and the Revelation. If "God reveals himself as Lord" (a characteristically Barthian assertion), then he must be Lord "antecedently in himself." Revelation is the reiteration in time of what God is in himself in eternity. There is thus a direct correspondence between:

- the revealing God;
- the self-revelation of God.

To put this in the language of Trinitarian theology, the Father is revealed in the Son.

So what about the Spirit? Here we come to what is perhaps the most difficult aspect of Barth's doctrine of the Trinity: the idea of "revealedness" (*Offenbarsein*). To explore this, we will have to use an illustration, not used by Barth himself. Imagine two individuals, walking outside Jerusalem on a spring day around the year AD 30. They see three men being crucified, and pause to watch. The first points to the central figure, and says, "There is a common criminal being executed." The second, pointing to the same man, replies, "There is the Son of God dying for me." To say that Jesus is the

self-revelation of God will not do in itself; there must be some means by which Jesus is recognized as the self-revelation of God. And it is this recognition of revelation as revelation that constitutes the idea of *Offenbarsein*.

So how is this insight achieved? Barth is quite clear: sinful humanity is not capable of reaching this insight unaided. Barth is not prepared to allow humanity any positive role in the interpretation of revelation, believing that this is to subject divine revelation to human theories of knowledge. Barth has been heavily criticized for this, even by those, such as Emil Brunner, who might otherwise be sympathetic to his aims. The interpretation of revelation as revelation must itself be the work of God – more accurately, the work of the Spirit. Humanity does not become capable of the Word of the Lord (*capax verbi domini*), and then hear the Word; hearing and capacity to hear are given in the one act by the Spirit.

All this might seem to suggest that Barth is really some kind of modalist, treating the different moments of revelation as different “modes of being” of the same God. It must be conceded immediately that there are those who charge him with precisely this deficiency. Nevertheless, more considered reflection perhaps moves us away from this judgment, although other criticisms can certainly be made. For example, the Spirit fares rather badly in Barth’s exposition, which in this respect can be argued to mirror weaknesses in the western tradition as a whole. However, whatever its weaknesses may be, Barth’s discussion of the Trinity is generally regarded as having reinstated the doctrine after a period of sustained neglect within dogmatic theology. That process of reinstatement has been further consolidated through the work of the Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner, to which we now turn.

Karl Rahner

Rahner’s particular contribution to the development of modern Trinitarian theology is generally agreed to be his analysis of the relation between the “economic” and the “immanent” Trinity. The basic distinction here is between the manner in which God is known through revelation in history (“the economic Trinity”), and the manner in which God exists internally (“the immanent Trinity”). The “economic Trinity” can be thought of as the way in which we experience God’s self-disclosure in history, and the

“immanent Trinity” as God’s diversity and unity as it is within the Godhead itself. Rahner’s axiom concerning their relationship, which is widely quoted in modern theology, takes the following form: “The economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity, and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity.” In other words, the way God is revealed and experienced in history corresponds to the way in which God actually is.

Karl Rahner (1904–84). One of the most influential of modern Roman Catholic theologians, whose *Theological Investigations* pioneered the use of the essay as a tool of theological construction and exploration.

Rahner’s approach to the Trinity is a powerful corrective to certain tendencies in older Roman Catholic Trinitarian theology, especially the tendency to focus on the “immanent Trinity” in such a way as to marginalize both human experience of God and the biblical witness to salvation. For Rahner, the “economic” Trinity relates to the “biblical statements concerning the economy of salvation and its threefold structure.” Rahner’s axiom allows him to affirm that the entire work of salvation is the work of one divine person. Despite the complexity of the mystery of salvation, a single divine person can be discerned as its source, origin, and goal. Behind the diversity of the process of salvation there is to be discerned only one God. This fundamental principle of the unity of the economy of salvation can be traced back to Irenaeus, especially in his polemic against the Gnostics (see pp. 28–9), who argued that two divine beings could be distinguished within the economy of salvation.

Rahner therefore insists that the proper starting point of Trinitarian discussion is our experience of salvation history, and its biblical expression. The “mystery of salvation” happens first; then we move on to formulate doctrines concerning it. This “previous knowledge of the economic Trinity, derived from salvation history and the Bible,” is the starting point for the process of systematic reflection. The “immanent Trinity” can therefore be thought of as a “systematic conception of the economic Trinity.” Rahner therefore argues that the process of theological reflection which leads to the doctrine of the immanent Trinity has its starting point in our experience and knowledge of salvation in history. The complexity of that salvation history is ultimately grounded in the divine nature itself. In other words, although we experience diversity and unity within the economy of salvation, that diversity and unity correspond to the way God actually is. “For these

modalities and their differentiation either are in God himself (although we first experience them from our point of view) or they exist only in us.” Rahner has no hesitation in rejecting the idea that these Trinitarian distinctions are random constructions of the human mind; therefore, he argues, they are grounded in the very being of God.

In other words, “Father,” “Son,” and “Holy Spirit” are not simply human ways of making sense of the diversity of our experience of the mystery of salvation. Nor are they roles which God somehow temporarily assumes for the purpose of entering into our history. Rather, they correspond to the way God actually is. The same God who appears as a Trinity is a Trinity. The way in which God is known in self-revelation corresponds to the way God is internally.

Robert Jenson

Writing from a Lutheran perspective, but deeply versed in the Reformed tradition, the contemporary American theologian Robert Jenson has provided a fresh and creative restatement of the traditional doctrine of the Trinity. In many ways, it is appropriate to regard Jenson as providing a development of Barth’s position, with its characteristic emphasis upon the need to remain faithful to God’s self-revelation. *The Triune Identity: God According to the Gospel* (1982) provides a fundamental reference point for discussion of the doctrine in a period which has seen fresh interest develop in this hitherto neglected area.

Jenson argues that “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” is the proper name for the God who Christians know in and through Jesus Christ. It is imperative, he argues, that God should have a proper name. “Trinitarian discourse is Christianity’s effort to identify the God who has claimed us. The doctrine of the Trinity comprises both a proper name, ‘Father, Son, and Holy Spirit’ ... and an elaborate development and analysis of corresponding identifying descriptions.” Jenson points out that ancient Israel was set in a polytheistic context, in which the term “god” conveyed relatively little information. It was necessary to name the god in question. A similar situation was confronted by the writers of the New Testament, who were obliged to identify the god at the heart of their faith, and distinguish this god from the many other gods worshiped and acknowledged in the region, especially in Asia Minor.

The doctrine of the Trinity thus identifies and names the Christian God – but identifies and names this God in a manner consistent with the biblical witness. It is not a name which we have chosen; it is a name which has been chosen for us, and which we are authorized to use. In this way, Jenson defends the priority of God’s self-revelation against human constructions of concepts of divinity. “The gospel identifies its God thus: God is the one who raised Israel’s Jesus from the dead. The whole task of theology can be described as the unpacking of this sentence in various ways. One of these produces the church’s trinitarian language and thought.”

Scholars of patristic thought have noted the way in which the early church tended to accidentally confuse distinctively Christian ideas about God with those deriving from the Hellenistic context into which it expanded. The doctrine of the Trinity, Jenson affirms, is and was a necessary defense mechanism against such developments. It allows the church to discover the distinctiveness of its creed, and avoid becoming absorbed by rival conceptions of divinity.

However, the church could not ignore its intellectual context. If, on the one hand, its task was to defend the Christian notion of God against rival conceptions of divinity, another of its tasks was to provide “a metaphysical analysis of the gospel’s triune identification of God.” In other words, it was obliged to use the philosophical categories of its day to explain precisely what Christians believed about their God, and how this distinguished them from alternatives. Paradoxically, the attempt to distinguish Christianity from Hellenism led to the introduction of Hellenistic categories into Trinitarian discourse.

The doctrine of the Trinity thus centers on the recognition that God is named by Scripture, and within the witness of the church. Within the Hebraic tradition, God is identified by historical events. Jenson notes how many Old Testament texts identify God with reference to his acts in history – such as the liberation of Israel from its captivity in Egypt. The same pattern is evident in the New Testament: God is recognized to be identified with reference to historical events, and supremely the resurrection of Jesus Christ. God comes to be identified in relation to Jesus Christ. Who is God? Which god are we talking about? The God who raised Christ from the dead. As Jenson puts it, “the emergence of a semantic pattern in which the uses of ‘God’ and ‘Jesus Christ’ are mutually determining” is of fundamental importance within the New Testament.

Jenson thus recovers a personal conception of God from metaphysical speculation. “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit” is a proper name, which we are asked to use in naming and addressing God. “Linguistic means of identification – proper names, identifying descriptions, or both – are a necessity of religion. Prayers, like other requests and praises, must be addressed.” The Trinity is thus an instrument of theological precision, which forces us to be more precise about specific identity of the God under discussion.

Case study 4.5 Twentieth-century discussions of the doctrine of the church

The twentieth century has seen renewed interest in the area of ecclesiology, partly on account of the rise of the ecumenical movement (concerned with the promotion of Christian unity), and partly through the enormous stimulus given to this area of theology through the process of renewal and reform initiated by the Second Vatican Council (1962–5, known also as “Vatican II”), especially the constitution *Lumen Gentium* (“A Light to the Gentiles” – note that authoritative Roman Catholic conciliar and papal statements are generally referred to by their opening words in Latin).

Variations on a theme: “Wherever Christ is, there is also the Catholic Church”

The first-century writer Ignatius of Antioch declared that “wherever Christ is, there is also the Catholic Church.” This memorable aphorism has had a deep impact on ecclesiological reflection – whether Protestant, Catholic, or Orthodox – throughout Christian history. In what follows, we shall explore three different twentieth-century ways of approaching this aphorism.

1. *Christ is present sacramentally* One of the most distinctive contributions of the Second Vatican Council to the development of ecclesiology is its assertion of the sacramental character of the church. As *Lumen Gentium* puts it, “the church, in Christ, is a kind of sacrament – a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all human beings.” The Council did not suggest that the church is a sacrament; the traditional Catholic sevenfold understanding of the sacraments is retained. Rather, the church is “like a sacrament” (*veluti sacramentum*). In making this statement, the Council seems to have been attempting to bring together the idea of the church as constituted by the word of God on the one hand, and as being a visible entity on the other. This idea is certainly present in Augustine’s concept of sacraments as “visible words.”

The idea of the church as sacrament has had a major impact on Catholic ecclesiology in the twentieth century. Even before the Council, such ideas were gaining momentum within the church. In part, this reflects the rise of a “theology of retrieval,” which sought to reappropriate a series of seminal themes from earlier periods in Christian history, most notably the patristic period, which adopted understandings of the nature of the church that contrasted sharply with the more institutional conceptions that had gained the ascendancy since the sixteenth century.

The idea can be seen clearly in the writings of Henri de Lubac, a pre-Vatican II theologian noted for his magisterial grasp of the patristic heritage. In his important work *Catholicism*, he writes:

If Christ is the sacrament of God, the church is for us the sacrament of Christ; she represents him, in the full and ancient sense of the term, she really makes him present. She not only carries on his work, but she is his very continuation, in a sense far more real than in which it can be said that any human institution is its founder’s continuation.

Although retaining an institutional understanding of the church, de Lubac gave a new sense of identity and purpose to Catholic conceptions of the church: the church is there to make Jesus Christ present to the world. Ignatius’s aphorism is therefore given new significance through this sacramental understanding of the role of the church.

In 1953, Otto Semmelroth published a highly influential study entitled *The Church as Primordial Sacrament*, in which he argues for the church as being the “primordial sacrament” (*Ursakrament*), demonstrating God’s ability to use the material order to bear witness to the spiritual. The Dominican theologian Edward Schillebeeckx (1914–2009) developed related ideas in his *Christ: The Sacrament of the Encounter with God* (1959). The overall effect of this approach is to integrate the fields of Christology, ecclesiology, and sacramentology into a coherent whole. Hans Urs von Balthasar adopts a strongly incarnational approach to his understanding of the church, arguing that the church is the *elongetur Christi* – the prolongation or extension of Christ in time and space. The Jesuit writer Karl Rahner continues this sacramental understanding of the church, declaring that the church is there to make Christ present in the world, in an historical, visible, and embodied form.

Rahner's approach has attracted considerable interest. For Rahner, the church "is the continuance, the contemporary presence of that real, eschatologically triumphant and irrevocably established presence in Christ in the world of God's saving will." The church is thus a "concrete manifestation of God's salvation of humanity," the enduring presence of God in the world (an idea anticipated in the sixteenth century in the writings of the Spanish mystic Teresa of Avilà). And, on account of its real historical presence in the world, it follows that it requires structures. For this reason, Rahner is able to justify a continuing institutional element in any Catholic understanding of the nature of the church, while at the same time insisting that these particular structures are not necessarily of defining importance. Furthermore, Rahner is prepared to concede a degree of flexibility in relation to those structures. What may have been appropriate to the definite historical circumstances of the past may not be appropriate today. The church must be free to achieve its sacramental mission in new historical structures.

Schillebeeckx differs from Rahner at some points of importance, most notably in his rejection of Rahner's argument that the church is the "primal sacrament" (an idea, as we noted above, which can be traced back to Otto Semmelroth). For Schillebeeckx, Christ must be regarded as that primal sacrament; whatever sacramental character the church possesses must be understood to arise through its relation with Christ.

Protestant critics of this approach have expressed anxiety about the relative lack of biblical foundation for the approach, and its relative lack of place for a theology of preaching. In view of the importance of this point, we may move on to consider more Protestant interpretations of Ignatius's axiom, which focus on the presence of Christ resulting from the preaching of the word of God.

2. *Christ is present through the Word* A central theme of Protestant understandings of the nature of the church focuses on the presence of Christ resulting from the proclamation of his Word, in preaching and the sacraments. For example, consider Calvin's classic statement on the nature of the church:

Wherever we see the Word of God purely preached and listened to, and the sacraments administered according to Christ's institution, it is in no way to be doubted that a church of God exists. For his promise cannot fail: "Wherever two or three are gathered in my name, there I am in the

midst of them” (Matthew 18: 20). ... If the ministry has the Word and honors it, if it has the administration of the sacraments, it deserves without doubt to be held and considered a church.

For Calvin, the preaching of the word and right administration of the sacrament are linked with the presence of Christ – and wherever Christ is, there his church is to be found as well.

This kerygmatic (Greek *kerygma*: “herald”) theme has continued to be of major importance in the twentieth century, particularly in the writings of Karl Barth. For Barth, the church is the community which comes into being in response to the proclamation of the Word of God. The church is seen as a kerygmatic community which proclaims the good news of what God has done for humanity in Christ, and which comes into being wherever the Word of God is faithfully proclaimed and accepted. As Barth put it in his 1948 address to the World Council of Churches, the church consists of “the gathering together [*congregatio*] of those men and women [*fidelium*] whom the living Lord Jesus Christ chooses and calls to be witnesses of the victory he has already won, and heralds of its future manifestation.” Barth’s ecclesiology is thoroughly Trinitarian at this point, involving Father, Son, and Spirit in a dynamic understanding of the nature of the church. For Barth, the church is not an extension of Christ, but is united with Christ, and called and commissioned by him to serve the world. Christ is present within his church, through the Holy Spirit.

The role of the Holy Spirit is particularly important in this matter. Although it would not be correct to say that Barth has a “charismatic” understanding of the church, his Christological approach to the identity of the church allocates a definite and distinctive role to the Holy Spirit, which Barth summarized as follows in his *Dogmatics in Outline*:

Credo ecclesiam [I believe in the church] means that I believe that here, at this place, in this assembly, the work of the Holy Spirit takes place. By that is not intended a deification of the creature; the church is not the object of faith, we do not believe in the church; but we do believe that in this congregation the work of the Holy Spirit becomes an event.

The church is thus seen as an event, rather than as an institution. Barth does not identify the Holy Spirit with the church, nor limit the operation of the Spirit to the bounds of the institution of the church. He argues that the Spirit empowers and renews the church, unites it with Christ’s redemptive work

on the Cross, and is the means by which the risen Christ is made present to the people of God. In this way, the Spirit safeguards the church from lapsing into purely secular ways of understanding its identity and mission.

Rudolf Bultmann also adopts a strongly kerygmatic approach to the nature of the church, linking Barth's emphasis on the foundational role of "proclamation" with the notion of "church as event":

The word of God and the church are inseparable. The church is constituted by the word of God as the congregation of the elect, and the word of God is not a statement of abstract truths, but a proclamation which is duly authorized and therefore needs bearers with proper credentials (2 Corinthians 5: 18–19). Just as the word of God becomes his word only in event, so the church is really the church only when it too becomes an event.

3. *Christ is present through the Spirit* A third major theme in twentieth-century ecclesiology has focused on the role of the Holy Spirit as constitutive of the church. Here, Ignatius's aphorism is interpreted in such a way as to emphasize the necessity of the Spirit in actualizing the presence of Christ. We have already seen the importance of this point in relation to Barth's ecclesiology; however, it is present in more developed forms in writers such as the liberation theologian Leonardo Boff, and the Orthodox theologian John Zizioulas. These two writers interpret their pneumatological (Greek *pneuma*: "spirit") understanding of the church in a different way. Boff remains Christ-centered, despite his emphasis on the Spirit, on account of his strongly western understanding of the Trinity; Zizioulas develops a much more Orthodox approach, based on a Cappadocian understanding of the role of the Spirit within the Godhead.

For Leonardo Boff, the constitutive role of the Holy Spirit in an understanding of the church rests on the fact that it is the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Whereas writers such as Rahner and von Balthasar had defended the view that the church was the physical embodiment or "re-presentation" of Christ in the world, Boff defends the view that the church is primarily the spiritual body of Christ, and is therefore not confined to any specific existing structures. In this respect, Boff can be seen as mounting a criticism of institutionalized understandings of the church, particularly those that flourished before the Second Vatican Council.

In his *Ecclesiogenesis: The Base Communities Reinvent the Church*, Boff provides a definition of the church that shows some parallels with kerygmatic understandings of the church:

The church comes into being as church when people become aware of the call to salvation in Jesus Christ, come together in community, profess the same faith, celebrate the same eschatological liberation, and seek to live the discipleship of Jesus Christ. We can speak of church in the proper sense only when there is question of this ecclesial consciousness.

For Boff, this “ecclesial consciousness” is the result of the work of the Holy Spirit, whose person and work is inseparable from the risen Christ. Boff interprets the creedal doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit from the Father and the Son as an affirmation of this point.

In the case of Zizioulas, however, the Holy Spirit is allocated a quite distinct role. Zizioulas points out how, especially in 1 Corinthians 12, Paul appears to allocate a constitutive role within the church to the Holy Spirit. Pneumatology is therefore not about “the well-being of the church ... it is the very essence of the church.” Zizioulas’s distinctive approach could be summarized as follows: the church may have been instituted by Jesus Christ, but it is constituted by the Holy Spirit.

Vatican II on the church

The Second Vatican Council introduced a new vitality into the discussion of the doctrine of the church, partly through its reappropriation of traditional biblical imagery relating to the church. Prior to the Council, Roman Catholic writers tended to think of the church in terms of a “perfect society.” This style of imagery dates from the later part of the sixteenth century, and emphasized the institutional credentials of the church, especially in the light of the increasing power of European nation-states. Part of the church’s strategy for asserting its independence from the increasing power of the state was to affirm its own identity as a society. Thus Roberto Bellarmine, one of the most important writers of the Catholic Reformation, argued that the church was as visible and tangible a social reality as “the kingdom of France or the republic of Venice.” Thus the standard edition of the pre-conciliar textbook of Adolphe Tanqueray (1854–1932) spends some 64 pages demonstrating that the church is (a) an

infallible society, (b) a perfect society, (c) a hierarchical society, and (d) a monarchic society.

Inevitably, this approach to ecclesiology led to the church being defined primarily in terms of its visible aspects, and particularly its visible structures of government and its codes of belief and conduct. The church was, in effect, modeled on social institutions of the late sixteenth century. There has always been an institutional aspect to Christian doctrines of the church, whether Protestant or Catholic. Thus both Luther and Calvin stressed the importance of proper church government. But neither of these reformers regarded the institutional element as being of defining importance. The critical thing was the gospel, not the institution. Similar insights are generally typical of patristic and medieval authors until the fourteenth century. At this point, increasing papal political power and a growing determination to fend off attacks on the institutions of the church (particularly the papacy and hierarchy) led to a growing tendency to defend these institutions by making them integral to a proper understanding of the church.

This tendency is generally thought to have reached its zenith during the nineteenth century. Responding to an increasingly dangerous political situation in Europe, where secularism and anti-Catholicism appeared to be on the increase, the First Vatican Council defined the church in strongly institutionalist terms, insisting that the church has all the marks of a true society. Christ did not leave this society undefined or without a fixed form; rather, he himself gave it existence, determined the form of its existence, and gave it its constitution. This strongly hierarchical conception of the church is perhaps seen most clearly in the rigid distinction between “the pastors and the flock,” grounded in the belief that the church of Christ is not a community of equals in which all the faithful have the same rights, but is rather a society of unequals, not only because among the faithful some are clergy and some are laity, but because there is in the church the power from God by which it is given to some to sanctify, teach, and govern, and to others it is not. This point was often expressed in terms of the distinction between *ecclesia docens* (“the teaching church,” referring to the hierarchy) and *ecclesia discens* (“the learning church,” referring to the laity, whose responsibilities were primarily to obey their superiors).

Yet by the middle of the twentieth century, Catholic scholars and theologians were increasingly expressing misgivings concerning this model.

In part, this reflects an awareness of the growing evidence which suggested that the early church did not have a coherent monolithic structure, but had at least a degree of flexibility over its institutions and orders. The emergence of a strongly organized and institutional church increasingly came to be seen as dating from after the apostolic period, and being a response partly to political pressures, such as those resulting from the imperial recognition of Christianity under Constantine. Lucien Cerfaux and others paved the way for a recovery of biblical and patristic insights which had been overlooked on account of the trend toward institutionalization. Others, such as Yves Congar, worked for the recovery of a theology of the laity, concerned over their marginalization in institutional models of the church. The result was that Vatican II was in a position to revitalize Roman Catholic thinking on this vital area of theology, with all its implications for ecumenism and evangelism. The results may be seen in the document *Lumen Gentium* (“A Light to the Gentiles”).

We have already explored the Council’s teaching on “the church as sacrament” (pp. 246–7), and the manner in which it has been developed by theologians such as Karl Rahner. In what follows, we shall explore three further aspects of the teaching of the Council on the nature of the church.

1. *The church as communion* In 1943, the German Catholic writer Ludwig von Hertling published a study entitled *Communio: Church and Papacy in Early Christianity*, which dealt with the importance of the theme of “communion” (often referred to by the Greek term *koinonia*) for a proper understanding of the nature of the church. This work had a deep influence on the Council’s reflections, and its distinctive themes can be found in the final statement on the church. On account of the overtones which the term “communion” now possesses, it is perhaps useful to employ the older English word “fellowship” to bring out the point at issue. The basic biblical theme which is expressed by this term is that of sharing in a common life, whether this life is thought of as the life of the Trinity itself, or the common life of believers within the church. The term possesses both vertical and horizontal aspects, the former referring to the relation between the believer and God, and the latter to the relationship between individual believers.

The recovery of this biblical idea proved to be a powerful corrective to the purely institutional conceptions of the church that had gained the

ascendancy during the nineteenth century. The regulatory enforcement of fellowship was now seen to be one aspect of the more fundamental idea of the fellowship between the believer and God, established through the death and resurrection of Christ, and lived out in the life of the church.

2. *The church as the people of God* Of the various models of the church set forth by Vatican II, the most important is that of the church as the “people of God.” This is a strongly biblical idea, with deep roots in both Old and New Testaments. Vatican II is careful to avoid the direct identification of “the people of God” with “the Roman Catholic church,” or the suggestion that the church has somehow displaced Israel as the people of God. Indeed, the second chapter of the Council’s text on the inner life of the church describes the church as the “new people of God,” continuous with Israel. The election of the church as the people of God does not entail the rejection of Israel, but rather the extension of God’s kingdom. This point is made particularly clearly in the Council’s Declaration on Non-Christian Religions, which recognizes a special continuing place for Jews in God’s purposes of salvation:

The Church of Christ acknowledges that in God’s plan of salvation the beginning of her faith and election is to be found in the patriarchs, Moses and the prophets. She professes that all Christ’s faithful, who as men of faith are sons of Abraham (cf. Galatians 3: 7), are included in the same patriarch’s call and that the salvation of the Church is mystically prefigured in the exodus of God’s chosen people from the land of bondage. On this account the Church cannot forget that she received the revelation of the Old Testament by way of that people with whom God in his inexpressible mercy established the ancient covenant. Nor can she forget that she draws nourishment from that good olive tree onto which the wild olive branches of the Gentiles have been grafted (cf. Romans 11: 17–24). The Church believes that Christ who is our peace has through his cross reconciled Jews and Gentiles and made them one in himself (cf. Ephesians 2: 14–16).

3. *The church as a charismatic community* The Second Vatican Council took place at a time when there was widespread interest in the charismatic movement. The impact of this development was felt strongly within some quarters of the Catholic church. It led to the Belgian Cardinal Leo-Josef Suenens delivering a powerful appeal to the

Council to include reference to this development in its reflections on the nature of the church. *Lumen Gentium* responded by explicitly recognizing the importance of charismatic gifts within the life of the church. The Council used the term “charism” (Greek *charisma*: gift) to refer to such gifts or abilities bestowed upon individuals to fulfill some specific service. This term has a long history of use, and does not necessarily imply the kind of “spiritual gifts” (such as speaking in tongues or the gift of healing) specifically associated with the charismatic movement. Nevertheless, the Pauline use of the Greek term *charisma* clearly includes such gifts, suggesting that the Council was allowing a significant degree of openness to this increasingly important aspect of the twentieth-century Christian experience.

Case study 4.6 Natural theology and the rationality of faith

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the heavens proclaim the work of God’s hands” (Psalm 19: 1). This well-known text can be seen as representing a general theme within the Christian Bible – that something of the wisdom of the God who made the world can be known through the world that was created. The exploration of this theme has proved to be one of the most fruitful areas of theology, which has become of increasing importance as a result of the rise of the Enlightenment.

The Enlightenment brought new challenges to Christian theology, above all raising questions about whether its fundamental beliefs could be defended rationally. In such an intellectual environment, the church’s public defense of the existence of God on the basis of an appeal to tradition or the Bible became increasingly problematic. The emergence of the fledgling discipline of “biblical criticism” eroded confidence in the reliability of the text of Scripture; the growing influence of “doctrinal criticism” challenged its traditional interpretations; and the rise of rationalism called the need for divine revelation into question. One apologetic strategy was to attempt to devise arguments for the Christian faith based purely upon reason; the other was to make an appeal to the natural world as a basis of faith.

The development of “natural theology” as an apologetic tool took place primarily in England during the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The rise of Deism in the seventeenth century – which can be seen as a local precursor of the Enlightenment – forced the English church to realize that it needed to defend the existence of God to an intellectual culture that was inclined to be skeptical about this notion. The church, realizing that it was increasingly difficult to base a dialogue with English academic thought upon the Bible, sought an alternative common ground for its apologetic discourse – and found it in the realm of nature. Natural theology thus rapidly became an important apologetic tool.

By the early eighteenth century, the concept of “natural theology” was firmly established within English religious culture as a means of demonstrating God’s existence without recourse to any religious beliefs or presuppositions. This represented an adaptation of the concept to the

realities of the English religious situation, primarily in response to the agenda of the Enlightenment. The idea of the “two books of God” – nature and Scripture – was widely explored as the basis of a defensible natural theology. One of the clearest statements of this approach is found in the writings of Sir Thomas Browne (1605–82), particularly his work *Religio Medici* (1643). Browne here set out his understanding of natural theology with an appeal to the wisdom of the ancients:

Thus there are two Books from whence I collect my Divinity; besides that written one of God, another of His servant Nature, that universal and publick Manuscript, that lies expans'd unto the Eyes of all: those that never saw Him in the one, have discovered Him in the other.

The most important work of English natural theology is widely agreed to be William Paley's *Natural Theology* (1802), which develops the image of God as the “watchmaker.” For Paley, the natural world exhibits indications of design – which point to a divine designer. Who, Paley asks, could look at the mechanical intricacies of a watch, without appreciating that someone had designed and constructed this complex piece of machinery?

The Industrial Revolution of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries led to growing popular interest in machinery – such as watches, telescopes, stocking-mills, and steam engines – on the part of England's ruling class. Paley appealed to this in developing his argument. How, Paley asked, could such complex mechanical technology come into being by purposeless chance? Paley develops this point by his appeal to the analogy of the watch. In setting the context, Paley highlights the fundamental distinctions between a stone and a watch, when both are encountered while crossing a heath:

In crossing a heath, suppose I pitched my foot against a *stone*, and were asked how the stone came to be there: I might possibly answer, that, for any thing I knew to the contrary, it had lain there for ever; nor would it perhaps be very easy to show the absurdity of this answer. But suppose I had found a *watch* upon the ground, and it should be inquired how the watch happened to be in that place; I should hardly think of the answer which I had before given, – that, for any thing I knew, the watch might have always been there.

What distinguishes the watch from the stone? The nub of Paley's answer can be summed up in the single word *contrivance* – a system of parts

arranged to work together for a purpose, manifesting both design and utility. Paley used the term “contrivance” to convey the dual notions of design and fabrication, appealing to the popular interest in machinery characteristic of the new age of industrialization then emerging in England. Paley then offers a detailed description of the watch, noting in particular its container, coiled cylindrical spring, many interlocking wheels, and glass face. This was obviously designed and manufactured.

Having established the force of this analogy, Paley then surveys the biological world, emphasizing both its complexity and the way in which its various features appear to have specific functions. The human eye, for example, is clearly enormously complex, and has been designed in order that human beings could see. Paley then draws his conclusion: these indications of purposeful design within the biological world point to someone who designed and executed them – namely, God as creator.

These ideas were developed further in England in the early Victorian period in a remarkable series of eight works of natural theology which appeared during the years 1833–6, collectively known as the *Bridgewater Treatises*. These were the result of a bequest made by the eighth Earl of Bridgewater, Francis Henry Egerton (1756–1829), who bequeathed £8000 to the Royal Society as a payment to the person or persons chosen by its president who would be invited to “write, print and publish, one thousand copies of a work” on natural theology. In the end, the Royal Society invited eight prominent “gentlemen of science” to write these treatises, showing how the complexities of nature pointed to a divine designer.

To illustrate the approach, we shall consider the argument set out in William Prout’s *Chemistry, Meteorology, and the Function of Digestion considered with Reference to Natural Theology* (1834). Prout here argues that certain physical characteristics of animals are indicative of divine design:

Animals in cold climates have been provided with a covering of fur. Men in such climates cover themselves with that fur ... Now, since the animal did not clothe itself, but must have been clothed by another, it follows that whoever clothed the animal, must have known what the man knows, and must therefore have reasoned like the man ... The man who clothes himself in fur to keep off the cold performs an act directed towards a certain end; in short, an act of *design*. So, whoever, directly

or indirectly, caused the animal to be clothed with fur to keep off the cold must likewise have performed an act of design.

These approaches to natural theology, based on an appeal to the complexity and adaptation of the biological world, would be called into question after the publication of Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Darwin's argument was that the appearance of design could arise through the process of natural selection over an extended period of time. How could one meaningfully speak of the divine "design" of the natural order, when that appeared to have emerged over an extended period of time by essentially natural processes? In fact, Paley's approach to natural theology had fallen into some disrepute by about 1850, and it was clearly a waning force in English intellectual circles – even if it did retain some popular appeal.

One of the most significant nineteenth-century criticisms of Paley's approach to natural theology came from the pen of John Henry Newman (1801–90). Newman made his distaste for Paley's "physico-theology" clear during the 1830s, developing two basic lines of argument against it: first, that it failed to establish a coherent connection between the natural world and faith in God; and second, that it failed to connect with the specific emphases of the Christian faith. Arguments from nature can only be inductive, and thus fail to establish the core ideas of faith. While they may be of service to those who already believe in God, offering reinforcement of these beliefs, natural theology lacks the evidential and argumentative rigor to establish such a belief in the first place. Newman famously rejected traditional arguments from design: "I believe in design because I believe in God; not in God because I see design." Paley's natural theology, Newman suggested, was as likely to lead to atheism as to belief in God.

Secondly, Newman raised concerns about the "God" disclosed by natural theology. If "God" amounted to little more than what the telescope or the microscope disclosed of nature, then "divine truth is not something separate from Nature, but it is Nature with a divine glow upon it." Such a notion of God is limited to a rational principle of interpretation, lacking any sense of transcendence, holiness, or majesty. Natural theology, Newman insisted, focused "exclusively" on only three divine attributes: power, wisdom, and goodness. Yet it remained silent concerning the real essence of the Christian vision of God – namely, the divine holiness, justice, mercy, and providence. Paley's approach to natural theology may indeed be apologetically useful in

demonstrating the capacity of the Christian faith to make sense of the natural order. But, taken on its own, it “cannot tell us anything of Christianity at all.”

Yet natural theology has moved on since these nineteenth-century debates, and is now enjoying a renaissance. In part, this reflects the growing realization that the natural sciences are raising fundamental questions about the origins and purpose of the universe, which cannot be answered by the scientific method. Many philosophers of religion – such as Richard Swinburne – have developed arguments for the existence of God based on the perception that there is an ordering within nature which requires to be explained.

Equally, the fact that the human mind can discern and investigate this ordering of nature is of considerable significance. There seems to be something about human nature that prompts it to ask questions about the world. And there seems to be something about the world that allows answers to those questions to be given. The noted theoretical physicist and Christian apologist John Polkinghorne comments on this point as follows:

We are so familiar with the fact that we can understand the world that most of the time we take it for granted. It is what makes science possible. Yet it could have been otherwise. The universe might have been a disorderly chaos rather than an orderly cosmos. Or it might have had a rationality which was inaccessible to us. ... There is a congruence between our minds and the universe, between the rationality experienced within and the rationality observed without.

There is, Polkinghorne asserts, a deep-seated congruence between the rationality present in our minds, and the rationality – the orderedness – which we observe as present in the world. Thus the abstract structures of pure mathematics – a free creation of the human mind – provide important clues to understanding the world. All of this, Polkinghorne argues, is a form of natural theology, preparing the way for the full knowledge of the Christian revelation.

Others, however, have raised concerns about natural theology, especially if this is understood as a way of demonstrating the existence of God through pure reason or reflection on the natural order, independent on the specifics of the Christian faith. The most important criticisms of natural theology during the twentieth century have come from Karl Barth, whose 1934

controversy with Emil Brunner over this issue has become something of a cause célèbre. We shall consider this in what follows.

In 1934 Brunner published a work entitled *Nature and Grace*. In this work he argued that “the task of our theological generation is to find a way back to a legitimate natural theology.” Brunner located this approach in the doctrine of creation, specifically the idea that human beings are created in the *imago Dei*, the “image of God.” Human nature is constituted in such a way that there is an analogue with the being of God. Despite the sinfulness of human nature, the ability to discern God in nature remains. Sinful human beings remain able to recognize God in nature and in the events of history, and to be aware of their guilt before God. There is thus a “point of contact” (*Anknüpfungspunkt*) for divine revelation within human nature.

In effect, Brunner is arguing that human nature is constituted in such a way that there is a ready-made point of contact for divine revelation. Revelation thus addresses itself to a human nature which already has some idea of what that revelation is about. For example, take the gospel demand to “repent of sin.” Brunner argues that this makes little sense, unless human beings already have some idea of what “sin” is. The gospel demand to repent is thus addressed to an audience which already has at least something of an idea of what “sin” and “repentance” might mean. Revelation brings with it a fuller understanding of what sin means – but in doing so, it builds upon an existing human awareness of sin.

Barth reacted with anger to this suggestion. His published reply to Brunner – which brought their long-standing friendship to an abrupt end – has one of the shortest titles in the history of religious publishing: *Nein!* (“No!”). Barth was determined to say “no!” to Brunner’s positive evaluation of natural theology. It seemed to imply that God needed help to become known, or that human beings somehow cooperated with God in the act of revelation. “The Holy Spirit ... needs no point of contact other than that which that same Spirit establishes,” was his angry retort. For Barth there was no “point of contact” inherent within human nature. Any such “point of contact” was itself the result of divine revelation. It is something that is evoked by the Word of God rather than something that is a permanent feature of human nature.

Underlying this exchange is another matter, which is too easily overlooked. The Barth–Brunner debate took place in 1934, the year in which Adolf Hitler gained power in Germany. Underlying Brunner’s appeal

to nature is an idea, which can be traced back to Luther, known as “the orders of creation.” According to Luther, God providentially established certain “orders” within creation, in order to prevent it collapsing into chaos. Those orders included the family, the church, and the state. (The close alliance between the church and the state in German Lutheran thought can be seen as reflecting this idea.) Nineteenth-century German liberal Protestantism had absorbed this idea and developed a theology that allowed German culture, including a positive assessment of the state, to become of major importance theologically. Part of Barth’s concern was that Brunner, perhaps unwittingly, had laid a theological foundation for allowing the state to become a model for God. And who, he wondered, wanted to model God on Adolf Hitler’s Germany?

Others, however, have questioned whether this is an accurate account of the situation. Surely the Christian faith itself seems to generate an expectation that God will be known, even if only partly, through the natural order. Surely the creator can be known, however dimly, through the creation? Writers such as Thomas F. Torrance (1919–2009) and Alister McGrath (b.1953) have suggested that natural theology arises “naturally” when the created order is viewed using a Christian theological framework. The debate continues.

Case study 4.7 The feminist critique of traditional Christian theology

Both Old and New Testaments use male language about God. The Greek word *theos* is unquestionably masculine, and most of the analogies used for God throughout Scripture – such as father, king, and shepherd – are male. Does this mean that God is male? This is an example of the type of question which feminist writers have asked concerning the traditional language and imagery of the Christian tradition. In this case study, we shall explore some aspects of the feminist critique of traditional Christian theology, noting its implications and the possible future directions which the discussion might take.

We begin by considering the question of the alleged “maleness” of God. It can be shown that certain persons or social roles, largely drawn from the rural world of the ancient Near East, were seen by biblical writers to be suitable models for the divine activity or personality. One such analogy is that of a father. Yet the statement that “a father in ancient Israelite society is a suitable model for God” is not equivalent to saying that “God is male,” or that “God is confined to the cultural parameters of ancient Israel.” Mary Hayter, reflecting on such issues in her work *New Eve in Christ* (1987), writes:

It would appear that certain “motherly prerogatives” in ancient Hebrew society – such as carrying and comforting small children – became metaphors for Yahweh’s activity vis-à-vis his children Israel. Likewise, various “fatherly prerogatives” – such as disciplining a son – became vehicles for divine imagery. Different cultures and ages have different ideas about which roles are proper to the mother and which to the father.

To speak of God as father is to say that the role of the father in ancient Israel allows us insights into the nature of God. It is not to say that God is a male human being. Neither male nor female sexuality is to be attributed to God. For sexuality is an attribute of the created order, which cannot be assumed to correspond directly to any such polarity within the creator God himself.

Indeed, the Old Testament avoids attributing sexual functions to God, on account of the strongly pagan overtones of such associations. The Canaanite fertility cults emphasized the sexual functions of both gods and goddesses; the Old Testament refuses to endorse the idea that the gender or the sexuality of God is a significant matter. As Mary Hayter puts it:

Today a growing number of feminists teach that the God/ess combines male and female characteristics. They, like those who assume that God is exclusively male, should remember that any attribution of sexuality to God is a reversion to paganism.

If Hayter is right, there is no need to revert to pagan ideas of gods and goddesses to recover the idea that God is neither masculine or feminine; those ideas are already potentially present, if neglected, in Christian theology. Wolfhart Pannenberg develops this point further in his *Systematic Theology*:

The aspect of fatherly care in particular is taken over in what the Old Testament has to say about God's fatherly care for Israel. The sexual definition of the father's role plays no part. ... To bring sexual differentiation into the understanding of God would mean polytheism; it was thus ruled out for the God of Israel. ... The fact that God's care for Israel can also be expressed in terms of a mother's love shows clearly enough how little there is any sense of sexual distinction in the understanding of God as Father.

In an attempt to bring out the fact that God is not male, a number of recent writers have explored the idea of God as "mother" (which brings out the female aspects of God), or as "friend" (which brings out the more gender-neutral aspects of God). An excellent example of this is provided by Sallie McFague, in her *Models of God* (1987). Recognizing that speaking of "God as father" does not mean that God is male, she writes:

God as mother does not mean that God is mother (or father). We imagine God as both mother and father, but we realize how inadequate these and any other metaphors are to express the creative love of God. ... Nevertheless, we speak of this love in language that is familiar and dear to us, the language of mothers and fathers who give us life, from whose bodies we come, and upon whose care we depend.

A similar point is made by Elizabeth Johnson, a Catholic professor of systematic theology at Fordham University, New York, in her landmark

publication *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (1992):

Although drawing their predominant speech about God from the pool of male images, the biblical, early theological, and medieval mystical traditions also use female images of the divine without embarrassment or explanation. The images and personifications are not considered feminine aspects or features of the divine, to be interpreted in dualistic tension with masculine dimensions or traits, but rather they are representations of the fullness of God in creating, redeeming, and calling the world to eschatological shalom.

The feminist critique extends beyond the question of the “maleness” of God; it also extends to other areas of theology. Three additional areas may be noted:

1. The doctrine of the Trinity traditionally involves the terms “Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” The first two are clearly male, raising issues for feminist writers. It is argued by some feminist writers that this difficulty can be overcome by using the phrase “creator, redeemer, and sustainer,” which are devoid of gender. Critics have responded that this involves defining the persons of the Trinity in purely functional terms, which represents a lapse into a form of **modalism**. Paul Jewett explores the issue of non-inclusive language within the doctrine of the Trinity in his *God, Creation and Revelation* (1991) by suggesting that it is at least hypothetically possible to speak of God in female terms:

Trinitarian heresy, which treats the three persons of the Trinity as different “modes” of the Godhead.

To speak of God as a mother who discloses herself to us in a daughter, though it is a hypothetical way of speaking, is not a heretical way of speaking. Given the realities of salvation history, we grant that it is a way of speaking with no prospects of being other than hypothetical. God the Creator, as we have observed, has given us our humanity in a sexual polarity and God the Savior has assumed that humanity as a male rather than a female. Yet the need to speak in this hypothetical way comes from the fact that women are justified in their complaint that the traditional understanding of our traditional language about God has made them second-class citizens both as members of the human race and as members of the family of God.

2. Jesus of Nazareth was male, and might therefore be argued to lack experience of being female, or have potential relevance to females. This point is made forcefully by a post-Christian feminist writer, Daphne Hampson:

The question of the compatibility of feminism and Christianity then is that of whether there can be a way of speaking of Christ's uniqueness which is not incompatible with feminism. . . . The problem of course with Christology for feminists is that Jesus was a male human being and that thus as a symbol, as the Christ, or as the Second Person of the trinity, it would seem that "God" becomes in some way "male."

3. Traditional concepts of sin are often framed in terms of power and domination, which are (at least in the view of some feminist writers) especially associated with men. Women, it is argued, suffer from other shortcomings – such as a lack of self-esteem – which are not properly addressed by traditional Christian theology. In a landmark 1960 discussion of the theological implications of gender differences, the feminist Valerie C. Saiving (1921–92) argued that classic expositions of the notion of sin, such as those found in the writings of Reinhold Niebuhr, reflect how sin has been experienced in a masculine and patriarchal world. Saiving suggests that the focus on pride characteristic of traditional Christian interpretations of sin reflects a specifically masculine experience that is inappropriate to the experience of most, if not all, women, who are much more likely to be prone to "triviality, distractibility, and diffuseness." Saiving thus holds that contemporary theologians make the mistake of assuming that a "thinking man's theology is equally good for a thinking woman."

The temptations of woman *as woman* are not the same as the temptations of man *as man*, and the specifically feminine forms of sin – "feminine" not because they are confined to women or because women are incapable of sinning in other ways but because they are outgrowths of the basic feminine character structure – have a quality which can never be encompassed by such terms as "pride" and "will-to-power." They are better suggested by such items as triviality, distractibility, and diffuseness; lack of an organizing center or focus; dependence on others for one's own self-definition; tolerance at the expense of standards of excellence; inability to respect the boundaries of privacy;

sentimentality, gossipy sociability, and mistrust of reason – in short, underdevelopment or negation of the self.

It will be clear that the feminist agenda thus has considerable implications for traditional Christian theology, at least in the West. Although the merits of some of the lines of criticism of traditional patterns of thought are contested, both inside and outside feminist circles, a significant debate is under way. The same may be said of the issues arising from the existence of religions other than Christianity in the world, to which we now turn.

Case study 4.8 Christian approaches to other religions

Christianity is but one world religious tradition among a host of others. So how does it relate to other religious traditions? The question is not modern; it has been asked throughout Christian history. Initially the question concerned Christianity's relationship with Judaism, the matrix from which it emerged in the period AD 30–60. And as it expanded, it encountered other religious beliefs and practices, such as classical paganism. As it became established in India in the fifth century, it encountered the diverse native Indian cultural movements which western scholars of religion have misleadingly grouped together and termed "Hinduism." Arab Christianity has long since learned to coexist with Islam in the eastern Mediterranean.

In the modern period, the question of the relation of Christianity has assumed a new importance in western academic theology, partly on account of the rise of multiculturalism in western society. As will become clear, three main approaches have gained currency. However, it will be helpful to begin by considering the idea of "religion" itself.

A naïve view of religion might be that it is an outlook on life which believes in, or worships, a Supreme Being. This outlook, characteristic of Deism and Enlightenment rationalism, is easily shown to be inadequate. Buddhism is classified as a religion by most people; yet here a belief in some supreme being is conspicuously absent. The same problem persists, no matter what definition of "religion" is offered. No unambiguously common features can be identified among the religions, in matters of faith or practice. Thus Edward Conze, the great scholar of Buddhism, recalled that he "once read through a collection of the lives of Roman Catholic saints, and there was not one of whom a Buddhist could fully approve. ... They were bad Buddhists though good Christians."

There is a growing consensus that it is seriously misleading to regard the various religious traditions of the world as variations on a single theme. "There is no single essence, no one content of enlightenment or revelation, no one way of emancipation or liberation, to be found in all that plurality" (David Tracy). John B. Cobb, Jr. also notes the enormous difficulties confronting anyone wishing to argue that there is an "essence of religion":

Arguments about what religion truly is are pointless. There is no such thing as religion. There are only traditions, movements, communities, peoples, beliefs, and practices that have features that are associated by many people with what they mean by religion.

Cobb stresses that the assumption that religion has an essence has bedeviled and seriously misled recent discussion of the relation of the religious traditions of the world. For example, he points out that both Buddhism and Confucianism have “religious” elements – but that does not necessarily mean that they can be categorized as “religions.” Many “religions” are better understood as cultural movements with religious components.

The idea of some universal notion of religion, of which individual religions are subsets, appears to have emerged at the time of the Enlightenment. The Enlightenment understandably yet wrongly regarded “religion” as a universal category. During the period of colonial expansion, many Europeans came across worldviews that differed from their own, and chose to label them as “religions.” In fact, many of these were better regarded as philosophies of life, such as Confucianism. Some were explicitly non-theistic. Yet the Enlightenment belief in a universal notion called “religion” led to these being forced into the same mould.

It is increasingly agreed that definitions of religion tend to reflect the agendas and bias of those who propose them. There is still no definition of “religion” that commands scholarly assent. Religion clearly belongs to what the philosopher Donald Brown calls “universals of classification” rather than to “universals of content.” “Universals of content” have shared core beliefs; “universals of classification,” on the other hand, share common patterns, but not necessarily individual beliefs. They have fuzzy boundaries, and lack easily distinguishable core convictions.

What, then, of Christian approaches to understanding the relation between Christianity and other religious traditions? In what way can such traditions be understood, within the context of the Christian belief in the universal saving will of God, made known through Jesus Christ? It must be stressed that Christian theology is concerned with evaluating other religious traditions from the perspective of Christianity itself. Such reflection is not addressed to, or intended to gain approval from, members of other religious traditions, or their secular observers.

One recent development needs to be noted at this stage. The revival in Trinitarianism in Christian theology during the twentieth century has led to

its explanatory and regulative fruitfulness being extended to include the theology of other religions. What is particularly significant about these Trinitarian approaches to other religions is that they do not adopt a Barthian critique of “religion,” but rather seek to understand both religions and their ideas within a Trinitarian framework.

The pioneering work in this field is generally regarded as being Raimundo Panikkar’s *Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* (1973). Panikkar argued that a Trinitarian framework offered a means of making sense of the complex nature of human spirituality, including religious experience and expression.

These ideas were developed further in 1991 by Ninian Smart and Stephen Konstantine. In their *Christian Systematic Theology in World Context*, Smart – a veteran commentator on world religions – and Konstantine argued that the concept of the “social Trinity” is the ultimate divine reality which constitutes the ground of all human religious experience. Differing forms of human spirituality are to be understood as arising from an experience of one of these three “aspects of the divine life” of the triune God.

In 1996, Jacques Dupuis (1923–2005) set out a different approach in his *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*. Dupuis, a Jesuit theologian with significant experience of the Indian context, argued that the doctrine of the Trinity “serves as the hermeneutical key for an interpretation of the experience of the Absolute Reality to which other religious traditions testify.” For Dupuis, this line of thought opened up further the lines of thought already developed by his fellow Jesuit, Karl Rahner. “It may be said that the divine Trinity is experienced, though hiddenly and ‘anonymously,’ wherever human beings allow the Divine Reality that impinges upon them to enter into their life. In every authentic religious experience the Triune God of Christian revelation is present and operative.” We shall explore Rahner’s notion of an “anonymous Christian” later in this section.

Gavin D’Costa’s *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (2000) further confirmed the fruitfulness of a Trinitarian approach to other religions. Though careful to emphasize that Christianity was the unique vehicle of divine salvation, D’Costa argued that the universal presence of the Holy Spirit had implications for other religions. For example, he suggested that the Christian church might be led more deeply into the life of God through an engagement with adherents of other religions, and that Christians may

observe “Christ-likeness” in these adherents on account of the universal presence and work of the Spirit. A similar approach is found with the Pentecostal theologian Amos Yong, especially in his *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to a Christian Theology of Religions* (2000).

Three broad approaches to a Christian understanding of other religions have emerged during the last century:

1. *Particularism*, sometimes known as “exclusivism,” which holds that only those who hear and respond to the Christian gospel may be saved.
2. *Inclusivism*, which argues that, although Christianity represents the normative revelation of God, salvation is nonetheless possible for those who belong to other religious traditions.
3. *Pluralism*, which holds that all the religious traditions of humanity are equally valid paths to the same core of religious reality.

We will explore each of these approaches in what follows.

The particularist approach

Perhaps the most influential statement of this position – still also referred to as “exclusivist” in the literature – may be found in the writings of Hendrik Kraemer (1888–1965), especially his *Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (1938). Kraemer emphasizes that “God has revealed the Way and the Truth and the Life in Jesus Christ, and wills this to be known throughout the world.” This revelation is *sui generis*; it is in a category of its own, and cannot be set alongside the ideas of revelation found in other religious traditions.

At this point, a certain breadth of opinion can be discerned within this approach. Kraemer himself seems to suggest that there is real knowledge of God outside Christ when he speaks of God shining through “in a broken, troubled way, in reason, in nature and in history.” The question is whether such knowledge is only available through Christ, or whether Christ provides the only framework by which such knowledge may be discerned and interpreted elsewhere.

Some particularists (such as Karl Barth) adopt the position that there is no knowledge of God to be had apart from through Christ; others (such as Kraemer) allow that God reveals himself in many ways and places – but insist that this revelation can only be interpreted correctly, and known for

what it really is, in the light of the definitive revelation of God in Christ. (There are important parallels here with the classic theological debate over natural and revealed knowledge of God.)

What, then, of those who have not heard the Christian gospel? What happens to them? Are not particularists denying salvation to those who have not heard of Christ – or who, having heard of him, choose to reject him? This criticism is frequently leveled at particularism by its critics. Thus John Hick, arguing from a pluralist perspective, suggests that the doctrine that salvation is only possible through Christ is inconsistent with belief in the universal saving will of God. That this is not in fact the case is easily demonstrated by considering the view of Karl Barth, easily the most sophisticated of twentieth-century defenders of this position.

Barth declares that salvation is only possible through Christ. He nevertheless insists on the ultimate eschatological victory of grace over unbelief – that is, at the end of history. Eventually, God's grace will triumph completely, and all will come to faith in Christ. This is the only way to salvation – but it is a way that, through the grace of God, is effective for all. For Barth, the particularity of God's revelation through Christ is not contradicted by the universality of salvation.

More recent expositions of the particularist position are associated with Stephen C. Neill (1900–84) and Lesslie Newbigin (1909–98), both British writers who spent a substantial part of their working lives as Christian bishops in India. Neill saw no tension between the affirmation of the unique status of Christianity, and having respect for, and interest in, other religions. Yet he was clear that Christianity, by its very nature, called the truth of other belief systems into question:

Christian faith claims for itself that it is the only form of faith for men; by its own claim to truth it casts the shadow of falsehood, or at least of imperfect truth, on every other system. ... But we must not suppose that this claim to universal validity is something that can quietly be removed from the Gospel without changing it into something entirely different from what it is.

Neill concedes that, to non-Christians, this must sound like “crazy megalomania, and religious imperialism of the very worst kind.” Yet he believes that, while this aspect of the Christian faith is open to sensitive statement and application, it cannot be denied or diluted.

Lesslie Newbigin similarly affirms the uniqueness of the Christian faith, and the missionary response which is required to its distinctive view of reality. One of Newbigin's most important contributions to the exclusivist position lies in his defense of the particularity of the Christian faith. Newbigin strongly resists any attempt to suggest that Christianity is just one perspective on God, or one way of seeing a greater reality. The pluralist alternative to traditional ways of thinking, he argues, is flawed.

The inclusivist approach

The inclusivist approach holds that Christianity creates theological space for other religions. Rather than seeing them as degradations or denials of the truth, they are to be seen as important milestones along the road to the Christian faith. These ideas can be seen developing in British India during the second half of the nineteenth century, as increasing numbers of British theologians became familiar with Hinduism at first hand. The "fulfillment hypothesis," especially associated with J. N. Farquhar (1861–1929), saw other faiths as pointing toward their fulfillment in Christianity.

The groundwork for the "fulfillment" model of the relation of Christianity to other faiths was laid by the English theologian F. D. Maurice (1805–72), whose *Religions of the World and Their Relations to Christianity* (1846) marked the beginning of the end of the missionary "defamation" of other religious traditions. Similar ideas were developed by B. F. Westcott (1825–1901), who spoke of "the progressive action of the Word" in the world's religions, and of a "Divine plan in the education of the world."

These ideas began to be reflected in the Indian context. In a course of lectures given at Madras in 1876, the missionary writer and thinker T. E. Slater set out the guiding principle of the "fulfillment" model as follows:

Not to present Christianity as an antagonistic Religion among other Religions of the world, not as a voice sounding the knell of doom to non-Christian nations, but, in the firm persuasion that all are by nature Christians, to hold it up as that in which Hindus would find realized and satisfied the noblest and earliest ideas of their sages, and the truest sentiments and yearnings of their hearts.

These ideas gained increasing popularity in the 1890s, resonating with a shift in both cultural and theological mood. In an editorial of 1908, the *Madras Christian College Magazine* cited some words of Jesus of Nazareth

from the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5: 17): “I came not to destroy but fulfill.” This, the editorial declared, “is not a word to be limited in its application to Judaism. All that there is of truth and inspiration in other religions must find its fulfillment in Jesus Christ.”

The outbreak of World War I brought such theological speculations to an end. Although such ideas were explored sporadically over the next decades, they never received the systematic exposition they required. The “fulfillment” approach to other religions was revived after World War II, particularly within Catholic theology. Jean Daniélou (1905–74) argued that Christianity was to be seen as the fulfillment of human longing for salvation and acceptance. Daniélou, a noted patristic scholar, developed arguments found in writers such as Justin Martyr, arguing that pagan religions are to be seen as “divine pedagogy.”

For Daniélou, the church “does not despise pagan teaching, but sets it free, fulfils it, and crowns it.” This has an important ecclesiological implication: that there are people who will be saved through Christ, who are not members of the visible church:

The domain of Christ and of the Church extends beyond the limits of the explicit revelation of Christ and of the visible expansion of the Church. In every age and in every land there have been men who believed in Christ without knowing Him and who have belonged invisibly to the visible Church.

The most significant advocate of this model in the twentieth century is the leading Jesuit writer Karl Rahner. In the fifth volume of his *Theological Investigations*, Rahner develops four theses, setting out the view, not merely that individual non-Christians may be saved, but that the non-Christian religious traditions in general may have access to the saving grace of God in Christ:

1. Christianity is the absolute religion, founded on the unique event of the self-revelation of God in Christ. But this revelation took place at a specific point in history. Those who lived before this point, or who have yet to hear about this event, would thus seem to be excluded from salvation – which is contrary to the saving will of God.
2. For this reason, despite their errors and shortcomings, non-Christian religious traditions are valid and capable of mediating the saving grace of God, until the gospel is made known to their members. After the

gospel has been proclaimed to the adherents of such non-Christian religious traditions, they are no longer legitimate, from the standpoint of Christian theology.

3. The faithful adherent of a non-Christian religious tradition is thus to be regarded as an “anonymous Christian.”

4. Other religious traditions will not be displaced by Christianity. Religious pluralism will continue to be a feature of human existence.

The first three of these theses need discussion in more detail. It will be clear that Rahner strongly affirms the principle that salvation may only be had through Christ, as he is interpreted by the Christian tradition. “Christianity understands itself as the absolute religion, intended for all people, which cannot recognize any other religion beside itself as of equal right.” Yet Rahner supplements this with an emphasis upon the universal saving will of God; God wishes that all shall be saved, even though not all know Christ: “Somehow all people must be able to be members of the church.”

For this reason, Rahner argues that saving grace must be available outside the bounds of the church – and hence in other religious traditions. He vigorously opposes those who adopt too neat solutions, insisting either that a religious tradition comes from God or that it is an inauthentic and purely human invention. Where Kraemer argues that non-Christian religious traditions were little more than self-justifying human constructions, Rahner argues that such traditions may well include elements of truth.

Rahner justifies this suggestion by considering the relation between the Old and New Testaments. Although the Old Testament, strictly speaking, represents the outlook of a non-Christian religion (Judaism), Christians are able to read it and discern within it elements which continue to be valid. The Old Testament is evaluated in the light of the New, and as a result, certain practices (such as food laws) are discarded as unacceptable, while others are retained (such as the moral law). The same approach can and should, Rahner argues, be adopted in the case of other religions.

The saving grace of God is thus available through non-Christian religious traditions, despite their shortcomings. Many of their adherents, Rahner argues, have thus accepted that grace, without being fully aware of what it is. It is for this reason that Rahner introduces the term “anonymous

Christians,” to refer to those who have experienced divine grace without necessarily knowing it.

This term has been heavily criticized. For example, John Hick has suggested that it is paternalist, offering “honorary status granted unilaterally to people who have not expressed any desire for it.” Nevertheless, Rahner’s intention is to allow for the real effects of divine grace in the lives of those who belong to non-Christian traditions. Full access to truth about God (as it is understood within the Christian tradition) is not a necessary precondition for access to the saving grace of God.

Rahner does not allow that Christianity and other religious traditions may be treated as equal, or that they are particular instances of a common encounter with God. For Rahner, Christianity and Christ have an exclusive status, denied to other religious traditions. The question is: can other religious traditions give access to the same saving grace as that offered by Christianity? Rahner’s approach allows him to suggest that the beliefs of non-Christian religious traditions are not necessarily true, while allowing that they may, nevertheless, mediate the grace of God by the lifestyles which they evoke – such as a selfless love of one’s neighbor.

In recent years, growing discontent with the shortcomings of the pluralist approach has led to the emergence of a variant inclusivist approach, sometimes referred to as “parallelism.” Irritated at pluralist attempts to shoehorn all the religions into the same basic pattern (to be considered presently), writers such as Joseph DiNoia and Mark Heim have insisted that the distinctive features of each religion must be respected. In his study *The Diversity of Religions* (1992), DiNoia pleads for religious diversity to be taken seriously, and offers a critique of what he regards as the shortcomings of reductionist approaches. In his *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (1995), Heim critiques three major pluralistic thinkers in his book: John Hick, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, and Paul Knitter. He argues that all three create paradigms that arise from and are informed by the world of Western liberal thought. The outcome is inevitable: they end up forcing religions into a preconceived mold.

For Heim, it is essential to respect religions for what they are. Instead of arguing that all religions ultimately lead to Christian truth (the inclusivist position) or to some ultimate reality that transcends all religious traditions (the pluralist position), Heim insists that we must take each religion’s understanding of its beliefs and goals seriously. Christian beliefs and

practices will lead to Christian goals – to the New Jerusalem. Muslims will attain a Muslim paradise on the basis of their beliefs and practices. Buddhist beliefs and practices will lead to Buddhist goals. And so on. Instead of forcing all religions to end up at the same place, Heim insists that we respect their own visions of what they are seeking to achieve.

Heim's position is itself a form of religious particularism. Writing from a Christian perspective, Heim insists that everyone must recognize both the actuality and the possible value of other religious particularisms, without trying to subsume them all into some grand religiously neutral theory. Heim argues that pluralism is actually crypto-inclusivist, in that it claims to believe in many goals but actually believes in only one – namely, “reality-centeredness” in the case of John Hick, liberation from social oppression for Paul Knitter, and universal faith and rationality for Wilfred Cantwell Smith.

The parallelist way of thinking allows for the possibility that different religions may be deeply and genuinely different, offering their adherents competing goals that, however good each may be, are profoundly incompatible. That is why the title of Heim's book is so significant: *Salvations* – in the plural. Against the pluralist insistence that all religions ultimately lead to the same salvation, Heim argues that we must acknowledge and respect each religion's own distinctive understanding of what salvation actually is. “Christians can consistently recognize that some traditions encompass religious ends which are real states of human transformation, distinct from that Christians seek.” Christian theology should therefore consistently recognize that there are (or can be) many different religious goals, and hence many different salvations.

This position raises a number of questions. Its fundamental approach could be described as a “plurality of absolutes.” All religions are to be recognized as being completely right in their own terms. But how can this be? Can all be right? Heim's argument, in effect, is that these claims are justified, epistemically speaking, even if they may be mistaken. This conclusion reflects a postmodern reaction against the modernist insistence on a single standard of justification for beliefs. The religions develop their own standards of determining what justifies a belief, and their beliefs are justified by their own standards. It is an argument that is not without its problems. However, it certainly moves us away from the modernist assumptions that underlie pluralism. It remains to be seen how this new approach will be evaluated in the coming years.

The Canadian theologian Clark H. Pinnock (1937–2010) and other inclusivists clearly believe that the difficulties encountered with the “particularist” or “exclusivist” model for understanding the relation of Christianity to other religions can be dealt with using the “inclusivist” approach. Others disagree; while recognizing the force of the difficulties with the “particularist” paradigm, they believe that these are more effectively addressed through a “pluralist” approach, to which we now turn.

The pluralist approach

The most significant exponent of a pluralist approach to religious traditions is John Hick (1922–2012). In his *God and the Universe of Faiths* (1973), Hick argues for a need to move away from a Christ-centered to a God-centered approach. Describing this change as a “Copernican Revolution,” Hick declared that it was necessary to move away from “the dogma that Christianity is at the centre to the realization that it is God who is at the centre, and that all religions ... including our own, serve and revolve around him.”

Developing this approach, Hick suggests that the characteristic of God’s nature which is of central importance to the question of other faiths is his universal saving will. If God wishes everyone to be saved, it is inconceivable that he should reveal himself in such a way that only a small portion of humanity could be saved. In fact, as we have seen, this is not a necessary feature of either particularist or inclusivist approaches. However, Hick draws the conclusion that it is necessary to recognize that all religions lead to the same God. Christians have no special access to God, who is universally available through all religious traditions.

This suggestion is not without its problems. For example, it is fairly clear that the religious traditions of the world are radically different in their beliefs and practices. Hick deals with this point by suggesting that such differences must be interpreted in terms of a “both–and” rather than an “either–or.” They should be understood as complementary, rather than contradictory, insights into the one divine reality. This reality lies at the heart of all the religions; yet “their differing experiences of that reality, interacting over the centuries with the different thought-forms of different cultures, have led to increasing differentiation and contrasting elaboration.” (This idea is very similar to the “universal rational religion of nature”

propounded by Deist writers, which became corrupted through time.) Equally, Hick has difficulties with those non-theistic religious traditions, such as Advaitin Hinduism or Theravada Buddhism, which have no place for a god.

The observed features of the world's religious traditions thus make it difficult to accept that they are all speaking of the same God. But a more fundamental theological worry remains: is Hick actually talking about the Christian God at all? A central Christian conviction – that God reveals himself definitively in Jesus Christ – has to be set to one side to allow Hick to proceed. Hick argues that he is merely adopting a theocentric, rather than a Christocentric approach. Yet the Christian insistence that God is known normatively through Christ implies that an authentically Christian knowledge of God is derived only through Christ.

For a number of critics, Hick's desertion of Christ as a reference point means abandoning any claim to speak from a Christian perspective. For example, the Catholic theologian Gavin D'Costa has been one of the most perceptive and persistent critics of John Hick's "pluralist" approach to other religions. D'Costa raises fundamental questions about whether the traditional threefold typology of approaches to other religions – exclusivist, inclusivist, and pluralist – is defensible. In this important critique of John Hick's approach, D'Costa argues that pluralism is actually just another form of exclusivism. Pluralism must always "logically be a form of exclusivism," in that philosophical pluralism "in fact involves specific and exclusive truth claims with specific and exclusive criteria for truth."

The debate over the Christian understanding of the relation of Christianity to other religious traditions is likely to continue for some considerable time, fueled by the rise of multiculturalism in western society on the one hand, and increased emphasis on missionary work on the other. The three broad viewpoints outlined above are likely to continue to be reflected in Christian writing on the matter for some time to come.

Where Next?

Having completed this introductory overview of the history of Christian thought, you may find yourself wondering where you go from here. This brief concluding section is intended to make some suggestions about how you can develop your interest in this fascinating subject.

1. You may find that you are attracted to a particular theologian. As you worked your way through the volume, it is possible *that one individual writer* has stood out as being of especial interest. If so, you might find it worth your while developing a special interest in that writer. Among those writers who are known to repay careful study, the following may be noted in particular: Irenaeus of Lyons, Athanasius, Augustine of Hippo, Anselm of Canterbury, Thomas Aquinas, Martin Luther, John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, Karl Barth, Karl Rahner, and Hans Urs von Balthasar. Engaging with a particular writer allows you to explore his or her personal biographical details and the cultural context against which their writings are to be set, as well as to engage with their distinctive ideas.

2. In much the same way, you may find yourself attracted to a *particular period* in the history of Christian thought. Many find the patristic period especially fascinating (with some choosing to specialize in the Greek-speaking east, and others in the Latin-speaking west); others find more tightly defined periods fascinating – for example, nineteenth-century English religious thought. Among those periods which are known to repay study, the following may be noted (in addition to those just mentioned): early medieval theology (c.1000–1300); the Reformation; sixteenth-century Spanish religious thought; eighteenth-century American theology; English mystical writers of the fourteenth century. This kind of study allows you to gain a deep understanding of a specific period in history and a number of writers who contributed to its theological enrichment.

3. In a similar way, you may find that you become interested in a *specific area of Christian thought* – for example, the doctrine of the person of Christ, or the Trinity. Exploring the development of one

general doctrinal area throughout Christian history is fascinating, and allows you to explore the impact of philosophical and cultural factors upon theology, as well as to interact with some landmark theologians. In my own case, I began my study of historical theology with a detailed engagement with the history of the doctrine of justification. This provided a “window” onto historical theology in general, as well as offering me particular insights into the way in which theology and legal theories have interacted. The following doctrinal themes (in addition to the two just noted) are known to be especially interesting: the work of Christ; the doctrine of grace; the relation of faith and reason; and the doctrine of the church.

4. You may find a particular *theological or ecclesiological tradition* worth exploring – for example, a denomination (such as Anglicanism, Lutheranism, Greek Orthodoxy, or Roman Catholicism), or a trend within the denominations (such as modernism, liberalism, or evangelicalism). Once more, all the above-mentioned are known to repay study, and will open doors to further reflection and engagement.

These are simply suggestions for further exploration; you will find some basic resources identified in the “For Further Reading” section, which are supplemented by a much more extensive online bibliography.

Details of Theologians

Peter Abelard (1079–1142). French theologian who achieved a considerable reputation as a teacher at the University of Paris. Among his many contributions to the development of medieval theology, his most noted is his emphasis upon the subjective aspects of the atonement.

Anselm of Canterbury (c.1033–1109). Born in Italy, Anselm migrated to Normandy in 1059, entering the famous monastery of Bec and becoming its prior in 1063 and abbot in 1078. In 1093 he was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury. He is chiefly noted for his strong defense of the intellectual foundations of Christianity, and is especially associated with the “ontological argument” for the existence of God.

Apollinaris of Laodicea (c.310–c.390). A vigorous defender of orthodoxy against the Arian heresy, who was appointed bishop of Laodicea at some point around 360. He is chiefly remembered for his Christological views, which were regarded as an overreaction to Arianism, and widely criticized at the Council of Constantinople (381).

Thomas Aquinas (c.1225–74). Probably the most famous and influential theologian of the Middle Ages. Born in Italy, he achieved his fame through his teaching and writing at the University of Paris and other northern universities. His fame rests chiefly on his *Summa Theologiae*, composed toward the end of his life and not totally finished at the time of his death. However, he also wrote many other significant works, particularly the *Summa contra Gentiles*, which represents a major statement of the rationality of the Christian faith.

Arius (c.250–c.336). The originator of Arianism, a form of Christology which refused to concede the full divinity of Christ. Little is known of his life, and little has survived of his writings. With the exception of a letter to Eusebius of Nicomedia, his views are known mainly through the writings of his opponents.

Athanasius (c.296–373). One of the most significant defenders of orthodox Christology during the period of the Arian controversy. Elected as bishop of Alexandria in 328, he was deposed on account of his opposition to Arianism. Although he was widely supported in the west, his views were only finally recognized at the Council of Constantinople (381) after his death.

Augustine of Hippo (354–430). Widely regarded as the most influential Latin patristic writer, Augustine was converted to Christianity at the northern Italian city of Milan in the summer of 386. He returned to North Africa, and was made bishop of Hippo in 395. He was involved in two major controversies – the Donatist controversy, focusing on the church and sacraments, and the Pelagian controversy, focusing on grace and sin. He also made substantial contributions to the development of the doctrine of the Trinity, and the Christian understanding of history.

Karl Barth (1886–1968). Widely regarded as the most important Protestant theologian of the twentieth century. Originally inclined to support liberal Protestantism, Barth was moved to adopt a more theocentric position through his reflections on World War I. His early emphasis on the “otherness” of God in his Romans commentary (1919) was continued and modified in his monumental *Church Dogmatics*. Barth’s contribution to modern Christian theology has been immense.

Basil of Caesarea (c.330–379). Also known as “Basil the Great,” this fourth-century writer was based in the region of Cappadocia, in modern Turkey. He is particularly remembered for his writings on the Trinity, especially the distinctive role of the Holy Spirit. He was elected bishop of Caesarea in 370.

Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976). A German Lutheran writer, who was appointed to a chair of theology at Marburg in 1921. He is chiefly noted for his program of “demythologization” of the New Testament, and his use of existential ideas in the exposition of the twentieth-century meaning of the gospel.

John Calvin (1509–64). Leading Protestant reformer, based in the city of

Geneva, noted chiefly for his major work *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

Clement of Alexandria (c.150–c.215). A leading Alexandrian writer, with a particular concern to explore the relation between Christian thought and Greek philosophy.

The Council of Trent. A major gathering of Catholic bishops and theologians, which aimed to reform the church in the face of Protestant criticisms, and clarify and defend Catholic doctrine. The sixth session, focusing on the doctrine of justification, concluded in 1547; the thirteenth session, dealing with the real presence, ended in 1551.

Cyprian of Carthage (d.258). A Roman rhetorician of considerable skill who was converted to Christianity around 246, and elected bishop of the North African city of Carthage in 248. He was martyred in that city in 258. His writings focus particularly on the unity of the church, and the role of its bishops in maintaining orthodoxy and order.

Cyril of Alexandria (d.444). A significant writer, who was appointed patriarch of Alexandria in 412. He became involved in the controversy over the Christological views of Nestorius, and produced major statements and defenses of the orthodox position on the two natures of Christ.

Gregory of Nazianzus (329–89), also known as “Gregory Nazianzen.” He is particularly remembered for his “Five Theological Orations,” written around 380, and a compilation of extracts from the writings of Origen, which he entitled the *Philokalia*.

Gregory of Nyssa (c.330–c.395). One of the Cappadocian fathers, noted especially for his vigorous defense of the doctrine of the Trinity and the Incarnation during the fourth century.

Hugh of St. Victor (d.1142). A theologian, of Flemish or German origin, who entered the Augustinian monastery of St. Victor in Paris around 1115. His most important work is *De sacramentis Christianae fidei* (“On the sacraments of the Christian faith”), which shows awareness of the new

theological debates that were beginning to develop at this time.

Irenaeus of Lyons (c.130–c.200). Probably a native of Asia Minor, who was elected bishop of the southern French city of Lyons around 178. He is chiefly noted for his major writing *Adversus haereses* (“Against the heresies”), which defended the Christian faith against Gnostic misrepresentations and criticisms.

Martin Kähler (1835–1912). A German Lutheran theologian with a particular concern for the theological aspects of New Testament criticism and interpretation. He was appointed to the chair of systematic theology at Halle in 1867. His most famous work is an essay of 1892, in which he subjected the theological assumptions of the “life of Jesus movement” to devastating criticism.

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–81). A significant representative of the German Enlightenment, noted for his strongly rationalist approach to Christian theology.

Martin Luther (1483–1546). Perhaps the greatest figure in the European Reformation, noted particularly for his doctrine of justification by faith alone, and his strongly Christocentric understanding of revelation. His “theology of the cross” has aroused much interest in the late twentieth century. Luther’s posting of the Ninety-Five Theses in October 1517 is generally regarded as marking the beginning of the Reformation.

Justin Martyr (c.100–c.165). One of the most noted of the Christian apologists of the second century, with a concern to demonstrate the moral and intellectual credibility of Christianity in a pagan world. His *First Apology* stresses the manner in which Christianity brings to fulfillment the insights of classical philosophy.

Philip Melancthon (1497–1560). A noted early Lutheran theologian, and close personal associate of Martin Luther. He was responsible for the systematization of early Lutheran theology, particularly through his *Loci communes* (first edition published in 1521) and his “Apology for the Augsburg Confession.”

Nestorius (died c.451). A major representative of the Antiochene school of theology, who became patriarch of Constantinople in 428. His vigorous emphasis upon the humanity of Christ seemed to his critics to amount to a denial of his divinity. Nestorius's failure to endorse the term *Theotokos* led to him being openly charged with heresy. Although far more orthodox than his opponents allowed, the extent of Nestorius's orthodoxy remains unclear and disputed.

Origen (c.185–c.254). Leading representative of the Alexandrian school of theology, especially noted for his allegorical exposition of Scripture, and his use of Platonic ideas in theology, particularly Christology. The originals of many of his works, which were written in Greek, have been lost, with the result that some are known only in Latin translations of questionable reliability.

Wolfhart Pannenberg (b.1928). One of the most influential German Protestant theologians, whose writings on the relation of faith and history, and particularly the foundations of Christology, have had considerable influence.

Pelagius. A British theologian who was active at Rome in the final decade of the fourth century and the first decade of the fifth. No reliable information exists concerning the date of his birth or death. Pelagius was a moral reformer, whose theology of grace and sin brought him into sharp conflict with Augustine, leading to the Pelagian controversy. Pelagius's ideas are known mostly through the writings of his opponents, especially Augustine.

Karl Rahner (1904–84). One of the most influential of modern Roman Catholic theologians, whose *Theological Investigations* pioneered the use of the essay as a tool of theological construction and exploration.

Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965). This leading German Protestant theologian was noted particularly for his work on the historical Jesus, which led to a series of influential publications calling the validity and presuppositions of the “quest of the historical Jesus” into question. In 1913,

he gave up his theological career to undertake medical work in Africa.

Tertullian (c.160–c.225). A major figure in early Latin theology, who produced a series of significant controversial and apologetic writings. He is particularly noted for his ability to coin new Latin terms to translate the emerging theological vocabulary of the Greek-speaking eastern church.

Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923). A theologian and sociologist who was closely involved in the founding of the “History of Religions School,” which placed an emphasis upon the historical continuity of the religions. His most important theological contributions are thought to lie in the field of Christology, especially his discussion of the relation between faith and history.

Vincent of Lérins (died before 450). A French theologian who settled on the island of Lérins. He is particularly noted for his emphasis on the role of tradition in guarding against innovations in the doctrine of the church, and is credited with the formulation of the so-called “Vincentian canon.”

A Glossary of Theological Terms

What follows is a brief discussion of a series of terms that the reader is likely to encounter in the course of reading works dealing with historical theology, such as the present volume.

adiaphora Literally, “matters of indifference.” Beliefs or practices which the sixteenth-century Reformers regarded as being tolerable, in that they were neither explicitly rejected nor stipulated by Scripture.

Alexandrian school A patristic school of thought, especially associated with the city of Alexandria in Egypt, noted for its Christology (which placed emphasis upon the divinity of Christ) and its method of biblical interpretation (which employed allegorical methods of exegesis). A rival approach in both areas was associated with Antioch.

Anabaptism A term derived from the Greek word for “rebaptizer,” and used to refer to the radical wing of the sixteenth-century Reformation, based on thinkers such as Menno Simons or Balthasar Hubmaier.

analogy of being (*analogia entis*) The theory, especially associated with Thomas Aquinas, that there exists a correspondence or analogy between the created order and God, as a result of the divine creatorship. The idea gives theoretical justification to the practice of drawing conclusions from the known objects and relationships of the natural order concerning God.

analogy of faith (*analogia fidei*) The theory, especially associated with Karl Barth, which holds that any correspondence between the created order and God is only established on the basis of the self-revelation of God.

anhypostasis A doctrine with its roots in the patristic period, but especially associated with later Protestant writers, which denies the independent existence of the humanity of Jesus Christ. According to this view, the humanity of Jesus Christ results from the decision of the second person of the Trinity to adopt and be united with human nature. It is to be contrasted

with the doctrine of *enhypostasis*, which affirms the independent existence of the humanity of Christ.

anthropomorphism The tendency to ascribe human features (such as hands or arms) or other human characteristics to God.

antinomianism The school of thought which denies any continuing role for the Old Testament law (Greek: *nomos*) in the Christian life. Views of this nature have been found throughout Christian history, although they were of particular importance at the time of the Reformation.

Antiochene school A patristic school of thought, especially associated with the city of Antioch (in modern Turkey), noted for its Christology (which placed emphasis upon the humanity of Christ) and its method of biblical interpretation (which employed literal methods of exegesis). A rival approach in both areas was associated with Alexandria.

anti-Pelagian writings The writings of Augustine relating to the Pelagian controversy, in which he defended his views on grace and justification. *See Pelagianism.*

apocalyptic A type of writing or religious outlook in general which focuses on the last things and the end of the world, often taking the form of visions with complex symbolism. The book of Daniel (Old Testament) and Revelation (New Testament) are examples of this type of writing.

apologetics The area of Christian theology that focuses on the defense of the Christian faith, particularly through the rational justification of Christian belief and doctrines.

apophatic A term used to refer to a particular style of theology, which stressed that God cannot be known in terms of human categories. Apophatic (Greek: *apophasis*, “negation” or “denial”) approaches to theology are especially associated with the monastic tradition of the eastern Orthodox church.

apostolic era The period of the Christian church, regarded as definitive by

many, bounded by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (c.AD 35) and the death of the last apostle (c.AD 90?). The ideas and practices of this period were widely regarded as normative, at least in some sense or to some degree, in many church circles.

appropriation A term relating to the doctrine of the Trinity, which affirms that while all three persons of the Trinity are active in all the outward actions of the Trinity, it is appropriate to think of those actions as being the particular work of one of the persons. Thus it is appropriate to think of creation as the work of the Father, or redemption as the work of the Son, despite the fact that all three persons are present and active in both these works.

Arianism A major early Christological heresy, which treated Jesus Christ as supreme amongst God's creatures, and denied his divine status. The Arian controversy was of major importance in the development of Christology during the fourth century.

atonement An English term originally coined by William Tyndale to translate the Latin term *reconciliatio*, which has since come to have the developed meaning of "the work of Christ" or "the benefits of Christ gained for believers by his death and resurrection." The phrase "theories of the atonement" thus means "way of understanding the saving work of Christ."

Barthian An adjective used to describe the theological outlook of the Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968), and noted chiefly for its emphasis upon the priority of revelation and its focus upon Jesus Christ. The terms "neo-orthodoxy" and "dialectical theology" are also used in this connection.

Beatific Vision A term used, especially in Roman Catholic theology, to refer to the full vision of God, which is allowed only to the elect after death. However, some writers, including Thomas Aquinas, taught that certain favored individuals – such as Moses and Paul – were allowed this vision in the present life.

Calvinism An ambiguous term, used with two quite distinct meanings. First, it refers to the religious ideas of religious bodies (such as the

Reformed church) and individuals (such as Theodore Beza) who were profoundly influenced by John Calvin, or by documents written by him. Second, it refers to the religious ideas of John Calvin himself. Although the first sense is by far the more common, there is a growing recognition that the term is misleading.

Cappadocian Fathers A term used to refer collectively to three major Greek-speaking writers of the patristic period: Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzen, and Gregory of Nyssa, all of whom date from the late fourth century. “Cappadocia” designates an area in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) where these writers were based.

Cartesianism The philosophical outlook especially associated with René Descartes (1596–1650), particularly in relation to its emphasis on the separation of the knower from the known, and its insistence that the existence of the individual thinking self is the proper starting point for philosophical reflection.

catechism A popular manual of Christian doctrine, usually in the form of question and answer, intended for religious instruction.

Catholic An adjective which is used to refer both to the universality of the church in space and time, and also to a particular church body (sometimes also known as the Roman Catholic church) which lays emphasis upon this point.

Chalcedonian definition The formal declaration at the Council of Chalcedon that Jesus Christ was to be regarded as having two natures, one human and one divine.

charisma, charismatic A set of terms especially associated with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In medieval theology, the term “charisma” is used to designate a spiritual gift, conferred upon individuals by the grace of God. Since the early twentieth century, the term “charismatic” has come to refer to styles of theology and worship which place particular emphasis upon the immediate presence and experience of the Holy Spirit.

Christology The section of Christian theology dealing with the identity of Jesus Christ, particularly the question of the relation of his human and divine natures.

circumincession *see perichoresis.*

conciliarism An understanding of ecclesiastical or theological authority which places an emphasis on the role of ecumenical councils. Although the term refers primarily to the admission of sin, it acquired a rather different technical sense in the sixteenth century – that of a document which embodies the principles of faith of a Protestant church, such as the Lutheran Augsburg Confession (1530), which embodies the ideas of early Lutheranism, and the Reformed First Helvetic Confession (1536).

consubstantial A Latin term, deriving from the Greek term *homoousios*, literally meaning “of the same substance.” The term is used to affirm the full divinity of Jesus Christ, particularly in opposition to Arianism.

consubstantiation A term used to refer to the theory of the real presence, especially associated with Martin Luther, which holds that the substance of the eucharistic bread and wine are given together with the substance of the body and blood of Christ.

correlation, method of An approach to theology especially associated with Paul Tillich (1886–1965), which attempts to relate the questions of modern western culture to the answers of the Christian tradition.

creed A formal definition or summary of the Christian faith, held in common by all Christians. The most important are those generally known as the “Apostles’ Creed” and the “Nicene Creed.”

Deism A term used to refer to the views of a group of English writers, especially during the seventeenth century, the rationalism of which anticipated many of the ideas of the Enlightenment. The term is often used to refer to a view of God which recognizes the divine creatorship, yet which rejects the notion of a continuing divine involvement with the world.

Demythologization An approach to theology especially associated with the German theologian Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) and his followers, which rests upon the belief that the New Testament worldview is “mythological.” In order for it to be understood within, or applied to, the modern situation, it is necessary that the mythological elements should be eliminated.

dialectical theology A term used to refer to the early views of the Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968), which emphasized the “dialectic between God and humanity.”

Docetism An early Christological heresy, which treated Jesus Christ as a purely divine being who only had the “appearance of being human.”

Donatism A movement, centering upon Roman North Africa in the fourth century, which developed a rigorist view of the church and sacraments.

doxology A form of praise, especially associated with formal Christian worship. A “doxological” approach to theology stresses the importance of praise and worship in theological reflection.

Ebionitism An early Christological heresy, which treated Jesus Christ as a purely human figure, although recognizing that he was endowed with particular charismatic gifts which distinguished him from other humans.

ecclesiology The section of Christian theology dealing with the theory of the church (Greek: *ekklesia*).

enhypostasis *see* **anhypostasis**

Enlightenment, the A term used since the nineteenth century to refer to the emphasis upon human reason and autonomy, characteristic of much of western European and North American thought during the eighteenth century.

eschatology The section of Christian theology dealing with the “end things,” especially the ideas of resurrection, hell, and eternal life.

eucharist The term used in the present volume to refer to the sacrament variously known as “the Mass,” “the Lord’s Supper,” and “Holy Communion.”

evangelical A term initially used to refer to the nascent reforming movements, especially in Germany and Switzerland, in the 1510 s and 1520 s, but now used of the movement, especially in English-language theology, which places especial emphasis upon the supreme authority of Scripture and the atoning death of Christ.

ex opere operantis; ex opere operato Two different ways of understanding the way in which sacraments are effective. The differences between them can be summarized as follows. To affirm that the sacraments are efficacious *ex opere operantis* – literally, “on account of the work of the one who works” – is to say that sacraments work on account of the personal moral qualities of the minister. The view that sacraments are efficacious *ex opere operato* – literally, “on account of the work which is worked” – sees the efficacy of the sacraments depending upon the grace of Christ, which the sacraments represent and convey, so that the personal qualities of the person ministering the sacrament are not of decisive importance. This distinction became of major importance during the Donatist controversy.

exclusivism A term once used to refer to the Christian approach to other religions which stressed the uniqueness of the Christian revelation. The term “particularism” is now more widely used.

exegesis The science of textual interpretation, usually referring specifically to the Bible. The term “biblical exegesis” basically means “the process of interpreting the Bible.” The specific techniques employed in the exegesis of Scripture are usually referred to as “hermeneutics.”

exemplarism A particular approach to the meaning of the death of Christ, which stresses the moral or religious example set to believers by Jesus Christ.

existentialism A movement which places emphasis on the subjectivity of

individual existence, and the way in which this is affected by one's environment. The theological development of this approach is especially associated with Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Tillich.

Fathers An alternative term for “patristic writers.”

feminism A major movement in western theology since the 1960s, which lays particular emphasis upon the importance of women's experience, and has directed criticism against the patriarchalism of Christianity.

fideism An understanding of Christian theology which refuses to accept the need for (or sometimes the possibility of) criticism or evaluation from sources outside the Christian faith itself.

fides qua creditur, fides quae creditur Christian theology has always recognized a distinction between the act and content of Christian faith. Two Latin terms are used to express this distinction, as follows. The term *fides qua creditur* (literally, “the faith by which it is believed”) refers to the act of trust and assent which lies at the heart of Christian belief. Yet Christian faith has a content, in that it knows what it believes, and believes what it knows. The term *fides quae creditur* (“the faith which is believed”) refers to the specific content of Christian faith, expressed in various creeds, confessions, doctrines, and other statements of faith.

Five Ways, the A standard term for the five arguments for the existence of God associated with Thomas Aquinas.

Fourth Gospel A term used to refer to the gospel according to John. The term highlights the distinctive literary and theological character of this gospel, which sets it apart from the common structures of the first three gospels, usually known as the “synoptic gospels.”

fundamentalism A form of American Protestant Christianity, which lays especial emphasis upon the authority of an inerrant Bible, and is noted for its tendency to reject critical biblical scholarship and to withdraw from society as a whole.

hermeneutics The principles underlying the interpretation, or exegesis, of a text, particularly of Scripture, particularly in relation to its present-day application.

hesychasm A tradition, especially associated with the eastern church, which places considerable emphasis upon the idea of “inner quietness” (Greek: *hesychia*) as a means of achieving a vision of God. It is particularly associated with writers such as Simeon the New Theologian and Gregory Palamas.

historical Jesus A term used, especially during the nineteenth century, to refer to the real historical person of Jesus of Nazareth, as opposed to the Christian interpretation of that person, as presented in the New Testament and the creeds.

historico-critical method An approach to historical texts, including the Bible, which argues that proper meaning must be determined only on the basis of the specific historical conditions under which it was written.

History of Religions School The approach to religious history, and Christian origins in particular, which treats Old and New Testament developments as responses to encounters with other religions, such as Gnosticism.

homoousios A Greek term, literally meaning “of the same substance,” which came to be used extensively during the fourth century to designate the mainstream Christological belief that Jesus Christ was “of the same substance as God.” The term was polemical, being directed against the Arian view that Christ was “of similar substance” (*homoiousios*) to God. *See also* **consubstantial**.

humanism In the strict sense of the word, an intellectual movement linked with the European Renaissance. At the heart of the movement lay not (as the modern sense of the word might suggest) a set of secular or secularizing ideas, but a new interest in the cultural achievements of antiquity. These were seen as a major resource for the renewal of European culture and Christianity during the period of the Renaissance.

hypostatic union The doctrine of the union of divine and human natures in Jesus Christ, without confusion of their respective substances.

ideology A group of beliefs and values, usually secular, which govern the actions and outlooks of a society or group of people.

Incarnation A term used to refer to the assumption of human nature by God, in the person of Jesus Christ. The term “incarnationalism” is often used to refer to theological approaches which lay particular emphasis upon God’s becoming human.

Inclusivism The way of understanding the relation between Christianity and other faiths which affirms that the Christian truth or salvation are, at least to some extent, accessible through other faiths.

justification by faith, doctrine of The section of Christian theology dealing with how the individual sinner is able to enter into fellowship with God. The doctrine was to prove to be of major significance at the time of the Reformation.

kenoticism A form of Christology which lays emphasis upon Christ’s “laying aside” of certain divine attributes in the Incarnation, or his “emptying himself” of at least some divine attributes, especially omniscience or omnipotence.

kerygma A term used, especially by Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976) and his followers, to refer to the essential message or proclamation of the New Testament concerning the significance of Jesus Christ.

liberal Protestantism A movement, notably associated with nineteenth-century Germany, which stressed the continuity between religion and culture, flourishing between the time of F. D. E. Schleiermacher and Paul Tillich.

liberation theology Although this term designates any theological movement laying emphasis upon the liberating impact of the gospel, the

term has come to refer to a movement which developed in Latin America in the late 1960s, which stressed the role of political action and oriented itself toward the goal of political liberation from poverty and oppression.

liturgy The written text of public services, especially of the eucharist.

Logos A Greek term meaning “word,” which played a crucial role in the development of patristic Christology. Jesus Christ was recognized as the “word of God”; the question concerned the implications of this recognition, and especially the way in which the divine “logos” in Jesus Christ related to his human nature.

Lutheranism The religious ideas associated with Martin Luther, particularly as expressed in the Lesser Catechism (1529) and the Augsburg Confession (1530).

Manicheism A strongly fatalist position associated with the Manichees, to which Augustine of Hippo attached himself during his early period. A distinction is drawn between two different divinities, one of which is regarded as evil, and the other good. Evil is thus seen as the direct result of the influence of the evil god.

modalism A Trinitarian heresy, which treats the three persons of the Trinity as different “modes” of the Godhead. A typical modalist approach is to regard God as active as Father in creation, as Son in redemption, and as Spirit in sanctification.

monophysitism The doctrine that there is only one nature in Christ, which is divine (from the Greek words *monos*, “only one,” and *physis*, “nature”). This view differed from the orthodox view, upheld by the Council of Chalcedon (451), that Christ had two natures, one divine and one human.

neo-orthodoxy A term used to designate the general position of Karl Barth (1886–1968), especially the manner in which he drew upon the theological concerns of the period of Reformed orthodoxy.

ontological argument A term used to refer to the type of argument for the

existence of God especially associated with the scholastic theologian Anselm of Canterbury.

orthodoxy A term used in a number of senses, of which the following are the most important: orthodoxy in the sense of “right belief,” as opposed to heresy; orthodoxy in the sense of the forms of Christianity which are dominant in Russia and Greece; orthodoxy in the sense of a movement within Protestantism, especially in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, which laid emphasis upon the need for doctrinal definition.

parousia A Greek term, which literally means “coming” or “arrival,” used to refer to the second coming of Christ. The notion of the *parousia* is an important aspect of Christian understandings of the “last things.”

particularism The understanding of the relation between Christianity and other faiths which affirms the distinctiveness of Christian truth and salvation.

patripassianism A theological heresy which arose during the third century, associated with writers such as Noetus, Praxeas, and Sabellius, focusing on the belief that the Father suffered as the Son. In other words, the suffering of Christ on the cross is to be regarded as the suffering of the Father. According to these writers, the only distinction within the Godhead was a succession of modes or operations, so that Father, Son, and Spirit were just different modes of being, or expressions, of the same basic divine entity.

patristic An adjective used to refer to the first centuries in the history of the church, following the writing of the New Testament (the “patristic period”), or thinkers writing during this period (the “patristic writers”). For many writers, the period thus designated seems to be c.100–451 (in other words, the period between the completion of the last of the New Testament writings and the landmark Council of Chalcedon).

Pelagianism An understanding of how humans are able to merit their salvation which is diametrically opposed to that of Augustine of Hippo, placing considerable emphasis upon the role of human works and playing down the idea of divine grace.

perichoresis A term relating to the doctrine of the Trinity, often also referred to by the Latin term *circumincessio*. The basic notion is that all three persons of the Trinity mutually share in the life of the others, so that none is isolated or detached from the actions of the others.

Pietism An approach to Christianity, especially associated with German writers in the seventeenth century, which places an emphasis upon the personal appropriation of faith, and the need for holiness in Christian living. The movement is perhaps best known within the English-language world in the form of Methodism.

pluralism An approach to the relation of Christianity and other faiths which regards the world's religions as equally valid manifestations or representations of the same fundamental spiritual reality.

postliberalism A theological movement, especially associated with Duke University and Yale Divinity School in the 1980s, which criticized the liberal reliance upon human experience, and reclaimed the notion of community tradition as a controlling influence in theology.

postmodernism A general cultural development, especially in North America, which resulted from the general collapse in confidence of the universal rational principles of the Enlightenment.

praxis A Greek term, literally meaning “action,” adopted by Karl Marx to emphasize the importance of action in relation to thinking. This emphasis on “praxis” has had considerable impact within Latin American liberation theology.

Protestantism A term used in the aftermath of the Diet of Speyer (1529) to designate those who “protested” against the practices and beliefs of the Roman Catholic church. Prior to 1529, such individuals and groups had referred to themselves as “evangelicals.”

Quadrīga The Latin term used to refer to the “fourfold” interpretation of Scripture according to its literal, allegorical, tropological/moral, and

analogical senses.

radical Reformation A term used with increasing frequency to refer to the Anabaptist movement – in other words, the wing of the Reformation which went beyond what Luther and Zwingli envisaged, particularly in relation to the doctrine of the church.

Reformed A term used to refer to a tradition of theology that draws inspiration from the writings of John Calvin (1510–64) and his successors. The term is now generally used in preference to “Calvinist.”

Sabellianism An early Trinitarian heresy, which treated the three persons of the Trinity as different historical manifestations of the one God. It is generally regarded as a form of modalism.

sacrament In purely historical terms, a church service or rite which was held to have been instituted by Jesus Christ himself. Although Roman Catholic theology and church practice recognize seven such sacraments (baptism, confirmation, eucharist, marriage, ordination, penance, and unction), Protestant theologians generally argue that only two (baptism and eucharist) were to be found in the New Testament itself.

schism A deliberate break with the unity of the church, condemned vigorously by influential writers of the early church, such as Cyprian and Augustine.

scholasticism A particular approach to Christian theology, associated especially with the Middle Ages, which lays emphasis upon the rational justification and systematic presentation of Christian theology.

Scripture principle The theory, especially associated with Reformed theologians, that the practices and beliefs of the church should be grounded in Scripture. Nothing that could not be demonstrated to be grounded in Scripture could be regarded as binding upon the believer. The phrase *sola scriptura*, “by Scripture alone,” summarizes this principle.

soteriology The section of Christian theology dealing with the doctrine of

salvation (Greek: *soteria*).

synoptic gospels A term used to refer to the first three gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke). The term (derived from the Greek word *synopsis*: “summary”) refers to the way in which the three gospels can be seen as providing similar “summaries” of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

synoptic problem The scholarly question of how the three synoptic gospels relate to each other. Perhaps the most common approach to the relation of the three synoptic gospels is the “two-source theory,” which claims that Matthew and Luke used Mark as a source, while also drawing upon a second source (usually known as “Q”). Other possibilities exist: for example, the Griesbach hypothesis, which treats Matthew as having been written first, followed by Luke and then Mark.

theodicy A term coined by Leibniz to refer to a theoretical justification of the goodness of God in the face of the presence of evil in the world.

theopaschitism A disputed teaching, regarded by some as a heresy, which arose during the sixth century, associated with writers such as John Maxentius and the slogan “one of the Trinity was crucified.” The formula can be interpreted in a perfectly orthodox sense and was defended as such by Leontius of Byzantium. However, it was regarded as potentially misleading and confusing by more cautious writers, including Pope Hormisdas (d.523), and the formula gradually fell into disuse.

theotokos Literally, “the bearer of God.” A Greek term used to refer to Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, with the intention of reinforcing the central insight of the doctrine of the incarnation – that is, that Jesus Christ is none other than God. The term was extensively used by writers of the eastern church, especially around the time of the Nestorian controversy, to articulate both the divinity of Christ and the reality of the Incarnation.

third quest A phrase used to describe the historical investigation of the life of Jesus initiated during the 1970s.

transubstantiation The doctrine according to which the bread and the wine are transformed into the body and blood of Christ in the eucharist, while retaining their outward appearance.

Trinity The distinctively Christian doctrine of God, which reflects the complexity of the Christian experience of God. The doctrine is usually summarized in maxims such as “three persons, one God.”

two natures, doctrine of A term generally used to refer to the doctrine of the two natures, human and divine, of Jesus Christ. Related terms include “Chalcedonian definition” and “hypostatic union.”

Vulgate The Latin translation of the Bible, largely deriving from Jerome, upon which medieval theology was largely based.

Zwinglianism The term is used generally to refer to the thought of Huldrych Zwingli, but is often used to refer specifically to his views on the sacraments, especially on the “real presence” (which for Zwingli was more of a “real absence”).

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